NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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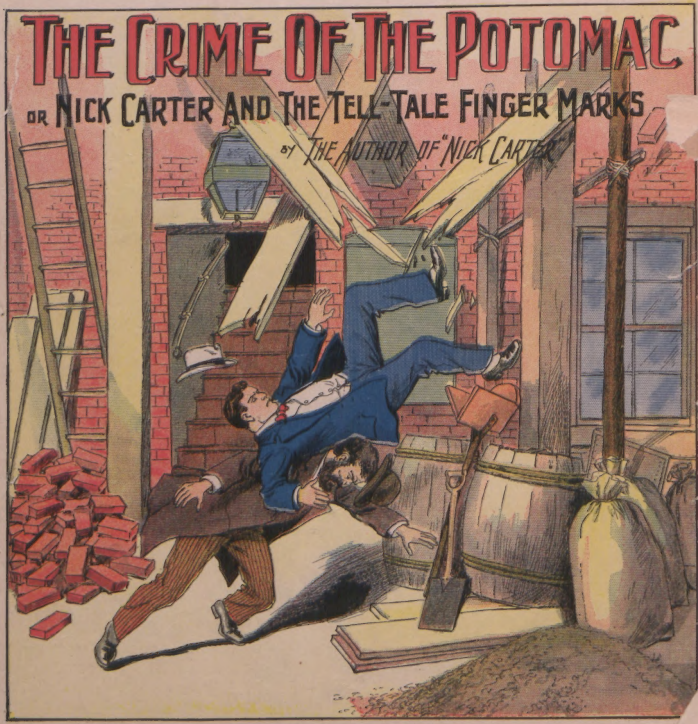
THE CRIME OF THE POTOMAC

OR NICK CARTER AND THE TELL-TALE FINGER MARKS

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



It all happened in the twinkling of an eye. Down went Nick, his body falling, with crushing weight, upon the head of the Russian.

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The Crime of the Potomac

OR,

Nick Carter and the Telltale Finger Marks.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A WASHINGTON MYSTERY.

"Now," remarked Nick Carter to his assistant, Chick, "I am ready to take a short rest. The Leonard-Dashaway case is ended."

"You have forgotten the missing bank notes, stolen from the body of Cora Reesey," interrupted Chick.

"That is a small matter. Some common thief, a river roustabout, may have robbed the body."

"I don't think so. I have no reason for my belief, so I must have an occult hunch, for I am eaten up with the idea that you are going to hear something regarding those notes before you are many months older."

Nick and Chick had recently returned from a short stay in St. Louis, where they were instrumental in solving a mysterious case, in which a woman named Cora Reesey, alias Madame Ree, had figured. She had been murdered, and when her dead body, taken from the river, had been searched at the morgue, fifteen thousand dollars in bank notes, known to have been in her possession when last seen alive, were not to be found.

The telephone rang before Nick could reply to Chick's last remark. The great detective placed the receiver at his ear.

"That you, Nick?"

"Yes, inspector."

"You're wanted in Washington. Come down to the office at once, if you can, and I'll explain."

"All right, inspector. I'll be with you inside of half an hour."

Nick was as good as his word, and, after the usual friendly greetings, the inspector began:

"Jackson Feversham, of Washington, is an old friend of mine, and naturally he first put himself in communication

with me, although he wants you. He wasn't certain that you were in the city, though he might have easily ascertained whether or not you were here by wiring your residence. If you were not in town, Chick, Patsy, or Ten-Ichi would have answered. But I see you are impatient. You want me to come to the point. Here it is: A murder, which is shrouded in mystery, has been committed in the national capital, the detectives there are at sea, and the call is for Nick Carter, the man of no failures."

"The Playfair case, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose you read the newspaper account this morning. Then you know as much about the affair as I do."

"Let me see if I can recite the facts as given in the press dispatch," said Nick. "James Playfair, a retired merchant, widower and childless, was found dead last night beyond the Mt. Vernon Ferry, at the foot of Seventh Street. He had been out for a moonlight excursion down the river, but instead of returning to his home on Maryland Avenue, nearly a mile beyond the capitol, he saw all his fellow excursionists depart and then walked down by the river shore. The body was found near one of the old, disused wharfs, now nothing but rows of unsightly piles. The only evidences of violence were finger marks about the throat. The police theory is that he was choked to death. Motive, robbery; for everything of value—purse, pocketbook, watch and rings, etc.—was stolen. No one was seen in his company after he left the Mt. Vernon wharf. He had no known enemies and he had lived an upright life."

"You have stated the case correctly, Nick," said the inspector. "Of course, there may be facts, clews, suspicions, which the reporters were unable to cover."

"I understand. Detectives are not in the habit of exposing their hands at the beginning of an investigation. There is a time for broad publicity as there is also a time for secrecy. What did your friend, Feversham, say in addition to what you have told me?"

"Nothing. He wants you, and that means that the mystery is a deep one. Playfair was Feversham's close friend. They were like brothers, and Feversham will spend a fortune, if necessary, to bring the murderer to justice. Can you start to-night?"

"Yes, and Chick and Patsy will go with me."

The next day Nick Carter and his two assistants were in Washington. Apprised of their coming, Jackson Feversham was at the B. & O. depot to meet them. Nick took to the man at once. He was past middle age, small, wiry, alert, with good humor and keen intelligence written on a thin, smoothly shaven face and sparkling from bright, black eyes. There was a striking resemblance in face, figure and expression to the late Lawrence Barrett, the popular tragedian and man of letters.

Private quarters on E Street—the great detective was disposed to shun the publicity of the hotels—were secured, and late in the afternoon, when conversation could be carried on with ease and freedom, Feversham told his story.

"The newspapers have given nearly all the facts that are in possession of the officers. I will now disclose to you what has not been published and also give you my own ideas concerning the murder. James Playfair had an appointment with me for eleven o'clock that fatal night. We were to make the final arrangements for a fishing trip to the Chesapeake. The excursion boat was scheduled to return at ten o'clock, for the river ride was to be a short one, having been gotten up for the benefit of some foreign visitors. I saw him off on the boat, and his last words were: 'I am going on this excursion as a matter of duty'—he was a member of the committee which had arranged the affair—'and when I return I shall hurry to your rooms.' These words, when taken in connection with my intimate knowledge of his private affairs, carry with them the conviction that he left the boat to keep an appointment."

"Then that appointment must have been made after you parted with him and before the boat left the wharf," said Nick.

"I think so, otherwise his parting words to me would have been different. He went off alone. Several persons saw him leave the wharf to go down toward the river shore. The person with whom he had the appointment, therefore, must have had powerful reasons of his own for not accompanying him. The matter is very suspicious, very mysterious, as you must perceive."

Nick nodded his head. Then he said: "Was Playfair a man of slight or powerful physique? In other words, would he have been able to have held his own with a man of ordinary strength?"

"Yes. He was of abstemious habits, remarkably well preserved, and hardy of constitution, and, in his prime, one of the best all-around athletes in the city."

"Then the man who murdered him must have been of more than ordinary muscular power. That is, if Playfair were strangled."

"How could he have met his death otherwise?" replied Feversham, regarding the detective in surprise. "The

finger marks on the throat determine the manner of death. The inquest is set for this evening. If there is other evidence you will learn it then."

"Have you anything more to tell, Mr. Feversham? I have been informed that Playfair had no enemies and that he led a very quiet life."

"That is true, Mr. Carter."

"Do you think he had anything on his mind lately?"

"No. He was as cheerful as usual when I last saw him alive. If he had been oppressed by any worry I should have known it."

"How long had he been a widower?"

"Ten years."

"No children, I believe?"

"No children of his own. His wife had a son by a former husband."

Nick pricked up his ears. "Where is that son?" he asked, quickly.

"I do not know. He was a wild sort of a chap and left home before his mother's death. I know that he was a source of great annoyance to Playfair, who spent many thousands of dollars in paying Arthur's gambling debts."

"Did Playfair ever mention his stepson's name?"

"It never passed his lips. For twelve years—ever since the young man left home—he was as dead to his stepfather."

"What is the fellow's full name?"

"Arthur Mannion; and if he is alive he should be about thirty years of age."

As Nick had no more questions to ask, Jackson Feversham went on: "Playfair was always considered an easy mark for both the society and the professional beggar. He had a soft heart and could rarely resist an appeal for money, no matter whether it came from a charity committee from his own walk in life or from the dirtiest, most whisky-sodden hobo that ever perambulated the streets. Therefore, my opinion is that some crime-hardened grafter accosted him just as the boat was about to leave. The fellow, of course, must have been well dressed, of fair intelligence and prepossessing appearance, who, after handing out the opening chapter of hard luck and woe, proposed the appointment by the river shore for the conclusion of the tale. Murder must have been intended in the first place and murder was done."

"Have any of the residents of the locality been interviewed?"

"I believe so."

"And no one was seen about the shore that night?"

"No. Even Playfair, as I have said, was not seen after he left the wharf."

"This shows that the people thereabouts were not out of doors that night. But perhaps the ground was not thoroughly gone over. Chick, suppose you go down there at once and interview everybody—white, black, child and adult."

"All right, Nick," and Chick was off.

"And now," said Nick, "for the beginning of the work. I shall require a list of the property stolen from the body. Have the officers been furnished with this?"

"Yes."

"Then my first visit must be to headquarters. While I am away, Patsy, you will mingle with the people and pick up crumbs, if there are any."

The secret service men, as well as the local police, of the capital had taken hold of the case, and from the superintendent Nick obtained a list of the valuables stolen, as far as the same could be ascertained. He was also put into possession of an item which imbued with new and strange interest the remarks made by Chick at the opening of this story.

"About a hundred yards from the spot where the body was found," said the superintendent, "a crumpled one-hundred-dollar bank note was picked up. It may have been the property of the dead man, or it may have belonged to the murderer, who dropped it while replenishing his pocketbook after the robbery."

Nick looked at the note. It was upon a Chicago bank, and the number corresponded with a number on a list of bank notes which he had carried away from St. Louis. Every number on the list was burned into his memory, for they were the notes stolen from the body of Cora Reesey.

It was plain, therefore, that if this bank note which the detective held in his hand was not filched from the pocket of James Playfair, but had been stowed away in the pocket of the murderer, then the murderer was the St. Louis robber.

And who was he?

Nick had the glimmer of an idea, but that was all.

CHAPTER II.

FEVERSHAM'S STRANGE DISCOVERY.

Having possessed himself of all the facts the local detectives were able to give, Nick Carter had dinner and then went to his rooms to await reports from Chick and Patsy.

Chick was the first to present himself.

"I suppose you have heard about the finding of the bank notes?" began Chick. "Well, there is this in addition: I found a negro—a wharf porter—who says that on the afternoon preceding the murder he had that note in his hands."

"Who gave it to him?"

"A dark-faced man of about thirty. The man wanted the negro to go into a grocery near the wharf and get the note changed. In explanation he said he owed the grocer a bill and wasn't ready to pay it. Otherwise he would go himself. The negro went to the store, but the grocer was short of small bills and so the note did not change hands."

"How does the negro know it is the same note?"

"By the number. He was afraid it was counterfeit and scrutinized it carefully."

"Had the negro ever seen the dark-faced man before?"

"No. He was a stranger."

"How was he dressed?"

"In a business suit of speckled brown. Derby hat. He wore a black mustache and had a diamond in his shirt front. That's all the description the negro could give."

"Did you make any other discoveries?"

"Yes, one more, and an important one, Nick. There's a man on L Street, near the river, who knows something. The negro saw him talking with the dark-faced fellow some fifteen minutes before the note-changing proposition was broached. The negro has just returned from a day's absence from town, and that's why his story has not yet reached the ears of the Washington sleuths."

"What is the name of the man who lives on L Street?"

"Prosper Craven. He is a man of family; used to keep the grocery and has some money, though he is far from rich."

"What is his reputation? Did you learn?"

"His reputation is good. But he is a silent, reserved man and does not mingle much among his neighbors."

"I must see him at once. Meanwhile wire Chief Wittman at San Francisco, asking him if he knows anything of one Arthur Mannion, giving description."

"What's your idea?"

"I'll tell your later. It is in the hatching process. It may be a chicken, it may be a duck."

Chick grinned. "I'll wait serenely," he said, "for I know that the result won't show that you are a goose."

Prosper Craven lived in a small, brick house near the car line. He was a sad-faced man of fifty years, with light blue eyes, which blinked continually, as if the sight were defective. His nose was long and sharp, his mouth wide and his chin narrow and nonaggressive. Nick sized him up when he came to the door as secretive, obstinate and weak in judgment. Not a man of force. He might err through weakness, but his aspirations were in the line of good. Corner him and it would be hard to tell what he would do.

After stating that he had important business to transact, the detective was invited into the house.

"Mr. Craven," Nick began, "a murder has been committed and every good citizen is expected to furnish information, if he have any, that will assist the officers in the search for the murderer. On the afternoon preceding the death of James Playfair you conversed with a dark-faced young man near this house. What is that young man's name?"

A troubled look came into Craven's face. He tapped the floor nervously with his foot.

"You don't suspect him, do you?" he asked, in affected surprise.

"You have not answered my question," returned Nick, sharply. "What is the man's name?"

A pause, then the answer: "Arthur Mannion."

"I thought so." Craven showed astonishment. His eyes blinked with unusual rapidity. "Now," continued Nick, in a tone which made the ex-grocer shiver, "what do you know of Mannion? What was your business with him?"

Craven's sallow face flushed. "I shall have to consult my attorney before answering your questions," he said, slowly and painfully. "I shall be guided entirely by his advice. He may advise me not to tell you anything."

"Not if what you know has any bearing on the murder?"

Craven did not reply. His expression was enigmatical.

"Don't you know," said Nick, "that Mannion is the stepson of James Playfair?"

"I know that, certainly; but that fact has no bearing on the matter about which you have interrogated me."

Nick Carter vented his dissatisfaction at the man's words and attitude by these strongly spoken remarks: "See here, Mr. Craven, you are acting very queerly. You are concealing something at a time when it is necessary, for the proper solution of this mysterious murder, that every act and circumstance that may have the slightest bearing upon the matter, as connected either with the words or movements of any suspected party, or those of

other parties having relation, remote or otherwise with Playfair's affairs, should be made known. You are a stranger to me, and yet, from your countenance, I think I have derived a sufficient knowledge of your character to say that I do not believe your concealment of any facts which you may have discovered arises from an unworthy motive. On the contrary, I am satisfied that you are acting from what you consider the best of motives. But this is a case in which personal feelings, a regard for the feelings of others"—with a keen glance at Craven's face, which flushed slightly under the scrutiny—"should give way before the graver public interest and the stern demands of justice."

"I thank you for your good opinion, sir," returned Craven, with emotion, "but my position is so peculiar, there are so many things to be taken into account, that, at this moment, I cannot see my way clear to a full explanation. My attorney must be the judge as to what I shall say."

"Very well," said Nick, coolly. "I can say no more than that in refusing to explain you will be taking a rather risky course."

"I am ready to take the consequences."

Craven's eyes, blinking, strayed from the detective's countenance to the ceiling. His mouth twitched slightly and he crossed and recrossed his legs nervously.

There was a short silence. Nick, not yet prepared to give up the quest for information, finally said:

"Mr. Craven, as a man of the world, as an honest man, as a detective anxious to serve the cause of justice, I believe it will be best, in spite of what you have said, that we come to a thorough understanding. I have the reputation of being a man of honor. In my possession [illegible] is sufficient, were they once made public property, to upheave society from San Francisco to Skowhegan. A layman, like yourself, is not a proper judge, in my opinion, of what is relevant and what irrelevant in matters pertaining to cases which may be tried in court. And in any case, I cannot proceed with celerity if I am to be hampered at the outset by what I conceive to be unwise concealment of facts. Justice strongly suggests that you tell me everything. Let me be the judge of what is material and what immaterial to the issues, resting assured all the while that no confidence which does not touch pointedly upon this case shall ever be violated."

"I will think over the matter," said Craven, slowly, "and give you my decision later. Will that suffice?"

Nick conned the obstinate face, and then said: "It will have to, I suppose."

When the detective left the house it was with the determination to have Craven's movements watched while his reticence continued.

At the inquest, that evening, the surgeon who conducted the autopsy was first examined. He had found all the organs in a healthy condition, and his opinion was that death had resulted from strangulation.

For reasons which the chief of the secret service men approved, Nick Carter did not give Craven's name to the coroner. The inquest, it was certain, could not, with positiveness, name the murderer, and therefore the main purpose of the official proceeding was carried out and in a satisfactory way. The verdict was that a murder had been committed and that death had resulted from strangulation.

One of the employees at the railway station—Hayman by name—nodded his head as the verdict was read, and these words fell from his lips:

"That's right, and I am onto the man."

"What's that?" The speaker was Nick Carter.

Hayman looked up, recognized the great detective; they were old acquaintances, and at once said: "I've got an idea, that's all."

"Then we will walk to a quiet place and you shall tell me about it," returned Nick, firmly; and taking Hayman by the arm he led the man to the sidewalk.

In the second story of a building a few doors below the morgue, Nick found a place suitable for a private conversation. It was one of a suit of rooms occupied by a lawyer of the detective's acquaintance. The lawyer luckily was in the main office at the time, doing night work on an important civil case on trial, and he cheerfully ushered them into the consultation office, where they would be secure from interruption.

After Nick and Hayman had lighted cigars the railway man spoke:

"I wish now that I had informed the coroner of what I know."

"Why didn't you inform him?"

"Because I was afraid I might suffer Playfair's fate. I have a family. I am anything but rich, and a man has to consider such things, you know."

"Oh! yes," said Nick, with a faint touch of scorn.

"On the night of the murder I was occupied in the railway office up to half-past eleven in making out my weekly statement. When I had finished I thought I would walk

down to the roundhouse and see if everything there was all right, for one of the wipers was sick and the other would not come on duty until midnight. I was close by the door and was about to turn the knob, when I heard the sound of voices. Two men were speaking. One was an American; the other's voice betrayed a slight accent which I could not place.

"'Two hours to wait,' said the American, 'before the train pulls out.'

"There was a short pause and then the other spoke: 'There's that Craven business. What if the fellow squeals?'

"'He won't dare to,' said the American, 'for he has too much fear of me. Besides, it was he who suggested that I come to Washington and interview the old man.'

"The voices ceased, and though I waited some five minutes, nothing more was said. Then I stole softly away, and, re-entering the office, telephoned the police officials that I had a couple of tramps for the boys. Fifteen minutes later the patrol wagon arrived with three policemen. I piloted them to the roundhouse, but the two men were gone."

"Did you tell the officers what you had heard while listening at the roundhouse door?"

"No. I should, perhaps, have done so had I not been called to the office by a stranger who desired to know at what hour in the morning the first passenger train started."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"Now that I think of it, his voice was the same as that of the foreigner of the roundhouse. I must be thick-headed, for the fact did not strike me at the time."

"There is little more to tell. The patrol wagon went off while I was talking to the stranger, and I thought no more of the matter until next morning, when I heard of the murder. Then I put two and two together and formed a certain conclusion."

"Describe this foreigner?"

"He was tall, dark-featured and wore a heavy, black beard."

"Have you no idea as to his nationality?"

"I can't be positive on the point, but am inclined to think he is a Russian. He looked like one, all right."

A Russian! Nick recalled his experiences with the Russian thugs of San Francisco, and wondered if by any possibility this man of whom Hayman had spoken could have been one of the number. Dorrant, the leader, was dead, and so were Sergius and Nicholas Wykoff. There remained only Dimitri Goloff, whose connection with the band had been slight, and who had evinced a desire to lead an honest life. Had he suffered a relapse? Hayman's description fitted him as far as externals went. But did he not possess some peculiarly distinguishing characteristic? Yes, he did—in his voice. "Hayman," said Nick, quickly, "what kind of a voice did this foreigner have? Was it light or heavy, harsh or clear?"

"It was heavy and harsh, like a fog horn."

Goloff it was, then. Nick felt his pulse quicken. How lucky it was that he had overheard Hayman's remark at the inquisitorial hearing! "Yes," he said, in answer to the question that looked out of the railway man's eyes, "I know the man, and now if only you could give me a description of the other man it would make my work much easier. But, of course, you can't, so I will have to go ahead on the presumption that he is the man I most desire to meet."

Hayman smiled reassuringly. "I think I can help you out, Nick. True, I did not see the cuss, but another man did."

Nick's face brightened instantly.

"The next morning," said the railway man, "I asked Harrington, the wiper who had laid off the fore part of the night, on account of not feeling well, if he had seen, before he went home, any persons hanging about the shops of the yard.

"'Yes, sir,' said he, 'I saw two men in front of the roundhouse when I came out at eleven o'clock.' Asked to described them, he said that both were tall. One looked like a foreigner. The other, though dark-faced, was an American. He wore a black mustache and his hat was a derby."

Nick expressed his satisfaction. "That settles it," he said. "Hayman, I am greatly obliged to you."

The great detective did not seek his bed that night until after he had had a watch placed on Craven's house and had enlisted the services of the Washington detectives in the search for Arthur Mannion.

It was Nick's opinion that Mannion had not left the city. The story told by Hayman furnished evidence that the graceless stepson of James Playfair had a confederate, and it would probably turn out that the two had murderously assaulted the old man. Perhaps one had held Playfair while the other had choked the victim to death.

The next morning brought a new surprise. Nick's first visitor, before the detective had made ready to go out,

was Jacob Feversham. He was in a high state of excitement and his opening words were:

"I have made a strange discovery, Mr. Carter."

"Ah! And what is it?"

"James Playfair's house was robbed before the murder. I found this out last night while overhauling the things in his rooms. I am his executor and I made an early investigation on account of the peculiar manner of his death. A week before he was murdered he had, in a drawer in his desk, over two thousand dollars. The money is gone, the lock of the drawer is broken."

"What makes you think the robbery was committed before the murder?"

"Because Playfair told me two days before his death that he must see a locksmith to have fixed a lock in his desk which had been broken. Every other lock was intact."

"Did he not make any reference to the robbery?"

"No. Nothing more was said, and the impression left on my mind was that he had himself broken the lock."

"Might he not have taken the money out of the drawer before the robber appeared?"

"I don't think so. In fact, I am positive that he did not. I'll tell you something about Playfair, Mr. Carter. He was a very peculiar man. He, of course, kept the larger portion of his cash in bank, but it was his custom to keep constantly on hand in his house two or three thousand dollars. He paid out much money in charity, as I have already told you, and he preferred to hand out the cash to deserving applicants rather than go to the trouble of drawing checks. He never carried much money in his pockets, never more than fifty or sixty dollars. No, he was robbed, and for some reason he desired to screen the robber."

"Do you know of any person, vicious in morals, whom he would have been likely to screen?" asked Nick, with a queer look in his eyes.

"Yes, I do. It's that scroundrel of a stepson, Arthur Mannion."

CHAPTER III.

NICK HAS A FRIGID IDEA.

Nick told Feversham what he had discovered bearing upon the case of Arthur Mannion, from which it became clear to Feversham that Mannion was the murderer. "But though I am convinced," said he, "that the stepson is the guilty man, I am puzzled over the motive. If Mannion robbed the house and secured two thousand dollars, why should he, a few days afterward, kill Playfair to obtain less than a hundred, or, say, two hundred, taking into consideration the watch and rings?"

"It is something of a puzzle," replied the detective, "but it is possible that I may arrive at a solution."

"If anyone can do so, you are the man," said Feversham, with conviction. "And can I be of any help to you?"

"You will help me by telling me all that you know about this stepson."

"I know that he is a scamp," was the emphatic response, "and I can't conceive of a reason why Playfair should desire to shield him. Hold on a bit, there is a reason. The mother, Playfair's wife. My dead friend fairly idolized her, and perhaps his lenity in the matter of the house robbery may be accounted for by his regard for the memory of his deceased wife."

"I think your explanation is a good one," said Nick. "In fact, I had thought of it myself."

"If I could only explain the motive of the murder I would be better satisfied, Mr. Carter, but I can't."

"Let me see if I can," rejoined Nick. "Mannion robbed the house, but his plunder did not consist wholly of money. He stole something else, something, I should say, of no value to anyone but the original possessor. Do you know whether the robbed drawer was used as a receptacle of anything except money?"

"He kept letters there."

"All his letters?"

"Oh, no, for the drawer would not have held them. There was a package of old letters which he kept there. I saw it often during his lifetime."

"Was the package there when you examined the drawer last night?"

"No. There was nothing whatever in the drawer."

"Then there is a partial explanation of the motive of the murder. Those letters gave Mannion some sort of a hold, not a criminal one," Nick added, quickly, as he saw Feversham's brow darken, "but a hold, in the nature of privacy, that was worth money to the robber."

"But why should murder have been done, Mr. Carter? If the hold, as you characterize it, was strong, would not Playfair have recognized and responded to it?"

"If I am not mistaken in my estimate of the man," replied Nick, quietly, "I think he would not have responded. He knew Mannion for a double-dyed villain. He had suffered himself to be preyed upon for years. One indignity had been followed by another, until at last, in the theft of

the letters, patience had ceased to be a virtue. He was willing that Mannion should keep the money he had stolen; he might have schooled himself to stand the loss of the letters without attempting legal reprisal, but the innate integrity of the man precluded any idea of payment for the return of the letters. Mannion, let us suppose, counting upon making a fat thing out of the letters, asked the appointment by the river, upon the representation that he would return them. He knew that he could not induce Playfair to meet him in any other way. Playfair kept the appointment, but, instead of receiving the letters as a free act of restitution, was confronted with the demand for money as a condition of the surrender. Now, knowing James Playfair, as you did, Mr. Feversham, what in your opinion would he have said and done, when the real object of the night appointment was made known to him?"

"He would have given Arthur Mannion a piece of his mind and he would have followed it up by a positive, indignant refusal to pay one cent for the letters."

"Precisely," said Nick, with a smile of approval, "and that, according to my theory, is what Playfair did. What followed? The usual thing, when an honest, virtuously resentful citizen is brought face to face with a discomfited, murderous-minded villain. With bitter, ungovernable rage in his heart, Mannion sprang at Playfair's throat. And he had assistance. Alone he would have had difficulty in overcoming such a man of science and muscle as James Playfair was. The Russian friend of his was close at hand. Attacked suddenly by two powerful men, Playfair was overcome. It may prove to be the fact that no other motive than revenge for Playfair's refusal to be held up, influenced the murderer when he made his attack, and it may turn out that the motive was a mixed one, in which revenge cut the smallest figure. The case is just opening and it is not the time to adopt any hold-fast theory?"

"Never mind the motive, Mr. Carter," said Feversham, almost fiercely. "We feel sure that Arthur Mannion is the assassin. Let us catch him and we can figure on motives afterward."

"Do you think it would be advisable to arrest Mannion now?" There was an odd ring in the detective's voice. Feversham gave him a sharp look and then impatiently replied:

"Of course I think it would be good policy. Don't you?"

"No. I would like to locate him, to keep him under surveillance until the time is ripe to strike, but to arrest him now might prove to be a serious mistake. We haven't evidence enough to hold him, and his first act would be to sue out a writ of habeas corpus. If he regained his liberty through the writ, as he probably would, he might do one of two things—defy us or skip the country."

Feversham's hopes instantly fell to zero. He looked as if he had received a blow in the face.

"Then we have nothing really to go upon," he said, in an acutely disappointed tone.

"Oh, yes, we have," said Nick, cheerily. "We have made a fine start and I hope before many days to have ready a pit for Mr. Mannion to fall into. As the matter now stands, we believe him to be the murderer. It's a sure shot that he is. But what evidence have we for the consideration of a jury? The murder was not witnessed. Mannion would deny it; we can't prove it. The robbery is an important side issue, but what evidence is there to show that Mannion was the robber? There is none at hand. All we have are a few facts which, standing alone, would be of small value, and some circumstances of strong weight in the pursuit of an investigation, of doubtful relevancy in trying a case in court. But patience, Mr. Feversham. We are gaining ground every day."

The dead man's friend exhibited relief, and when he departed there was hope in his heart.

That forenoon Chief Wittman, from San Francisco, answered Nick's wire in reference to Mannion in these words: "Mannion discharged San Quentin prison, forgery, four months ago. Was thick with Cora Reesey before woman left for St. Louis."

One statement in the telegram Nick at the time passed over lightly, for its significance then was not apparent. Illumination was to come later, but the association of Mannion with Cora Reesey, the woman murdered in St. Louis, furnished food for thought. The discovery of the bank note, taken in connection with Mannion's intimacy with the woman who had possession of it, and others, at the time she was killed, was presumptive evidence that he robbed the body. Goloff, the Russian, had been connected with the San Francisco case in which Cora Reesey had figured, and it was probable that Mannion had made the man's acquaintance in San Francisco as it was also probable that the two men had come East together.

Patsy, who had started out early on a lone stunt, showed a bright, eager face to the great detective shortly before noon.

"It's lucky you fixed me this morning, Mr. Carter," he said, with an expression of profound satisfaction.

Nick smiled inwardly. He knew his skillful young assistant had found something.

"Why, Patsy?"

"Because, with the stuff in my pocket, I was able to make good at a critical time. With the bones you gave me I made change for a big, green fellow. You see, it was this way"—hurrying on before Nick could interrupt—"I was playing bootblack this morning on the sidewalk in front of Lafayette Square, when a nobby sport with a dark face and a black mustache walks out of the White House grounds and crosses over to me. 'Shine?' says I. 'Sure,' he chirps, and I goes ahead and does my work on his patent leathers. When I gets through the top-lofty guinea flips a century rag in my face. Thought he'd faze me, maybe. But he didn't. I fazed him. I changed the bill, though it reduced me to cases."

"Well?" looking at Patsy, quizzically.

"I have the numbers of those Reesey-Leonard notes in my block, Mr. Carter," said Patsy, with an air of triumph, "and this note of mine belonged to that batch."

A variety of emotions were exhibited in Nick Carter's face during the moment that followed the young detective's statement. Joy was succeeded by disappointment, hope took disappointment's place, anxiety at last shadowed all.

"When did you make the discovery of the murder?" he asked, concealing his nervousness.

"The minute he plunked down the bill."

"Good, good. And when you had made the change, what did you do?"

Patsy regarded his superior in pained surprise. "Do? Why, what any detective with a spoonful of sense would have done. I shadowed the piker, Mr. Carter."

Nick's strong face became a sunbeam in a moment. "Of course, you did, Patsy. I might have known that without asking. Well, and did you hole him?"

"That's what I did. I know where he bunks and I know that he has engaged a room for a month—engaged it two days ago."

"Where is the place?"

"L Street, a block beyond Craven's house."

"Nearer the river than Craven's?"

"Yes."

"What is it? A lodging house?"

"Nope, and you can't mind it, for carpenters are repairing the front, which is all covered with scaffolding."

Chick appeared while this conversation was going on. He had been out on a scout, and he, too, had something of importance to report. "The Russian has not left town," he said. "I've seen him, and it's Goloff, sure. I passed him on the street, and he did not know me from a side of sole leather." As Nick's capable assistant had that morning chosen for his day's disguise the part of a young German, newly arrived, it was not likely that his identity had been suspected.

"There is some deep game on the hooks," was Chick's comment after he had been informed of Patsy's news. "There is something in Washington which is of powerful interest to this pair of knaves. And they are still playing in together, for I didn't let Goloff out of sight until I had seen him enter the house with the scaffolding on L Street. What is the game, I wonder? It must be a golden one, or they wouldn't be taking the risk of an arrest for murder."

"Let us look at matters from what I will assume to be their standpoint," said Nick. "They probably think they are running no risk. They must believe that the murder was not witnessed and that no clew was left behind which would point suspicion in their direction. The bank note found near the river is a clew, it is true, but Mannion, who lost the note, cannot regard it as such, for he does not know that I have the list of the notes which Cora Reesey possessed. No one knows the fact except you, Chick, Patsy and the chief of the St. Louis police. And it is safe to assume that he is ignorant of the fact that the negro wharf porter memorized the number, when he was given the note to change, for I cautioned him against repeating his story to anyone not an officer. The negro is an old resident, and his reputation is of the best. Therefore, the loss of the bank note would mean to Mannion nothing more than the loss of an ordinary note."

"How about the railway roundhouse affair?" asked Chick.

"There is no reason to believe that either Mannion or Goloff suspect that their talk was overheard, although they may have feared that their presence there was known. Men are to be judged by their conduct. The after movements of the two criminals show to any reasoning person that they left the roundhouse in as calm a state of mind as when they entered it. So, believing themselves to be, if not absolutely safe from suspicion, yet safe enough to laugh at the idea of arrest, they have elected to remain here to complete the work which brought them from California. I was not surprised to learn from Patsy that Man-

nion has appeared in public. I would have been surprised had he stayed in hiding, for that act would have raised the presumption that he knew he had not covered all his tracks, and that there was a clew which would prove fatal to his peace, if the detectives should come upon it."

"If he finds out, as he may, that you are on his track, Nick, he will get cold feet in a second."

"Maybe so, Chick," returned the great detective. "And if so, the frigidity may strike his extremities this afternoon, for I am going to call upon him."

"What! As Nick Carter?"

"Oh, no; as Juba Johnsing, the negro who failed to change the note for him. I can make up so that he will never spot the difference. He saw the wharf porter but for a few moments, as you will remember, and probably paid little or no attention to him. I'll make the ripple, Chick, and there's going to be fun."

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH FOLLOWS NICK CARTER'S FALL.

In the afternoon Nick, disguised as a negro porter, went to L Street. Chick and Patsy had been instructed in the rôles they were to play. The house described by Patsy was found, but the carpenters and painters were not there, although the scaffolding was still in place. As the day was Saturday, Nick found an explanation for the absence of the workmen. According to union rules, every Saturday afternoon is a holiday. The sidewalk had not been cleared and there were boxes, bricks, broken boards and odds and ends lying about. Just beyond the entrance to the stairway, and near the edge of the sidewalk, was a large hair mattress, the ticking which covered it being torn in many places.

Nick went up the stairs and stopped in front of a small, dingy office, presided over by a slatternly woman of middle age.

"Is Misto Mannion stayin' heah?" he asked, with an engaging smile.

"Room eighteen, this flo'," was the short answer.

"Ah'm gretly ableeged, Mistis. Ah'll fine hit, mahse'f. Don' yo' stir you' bones on mah 'count." As the woman made no effort to move, but simply stared at him, the [illegible] was [illegible].

Before the room whose windows overlooked the back yard Nick stopped, for inside a man was singing softly to himself. The voice was a light tenor and was pleasing to the ear.

"The fellow is in happy spirits, apparently," thought the detective. "Hope I won't agitate him too much."

He knocked gently and presently the door opened and a tall, rather handsome young man, with dark face, red, womanish lips, cold, blue eyes set close together, and a low forehead confronted him. Women might be deceived in respect to his character. Men of sense would not be likely to trust him. He was dressed in the height of fashion and seemed entirely at his ease.

His eyes, in cool inquiry, sought the face of the black-faced caller, whose form trembled slightly.

"Well," he said, curtly, "what can I do for you?"

"Ise—Ise de pusson yo' talked to tudder day down by de w'arf, sah," said Nick, humbly. "Yo' gimme dat bank bill fo' ter git changed, sah. Don' yo' 'member dat perceedin'?"

"Yes." A change, swift as lightning, swept over Mannion's countenance. He was no longer cool and nonchalant, but keen, alert, on his guard. "What about it?"

"Nuffin', sah, on'y I sho' don' desiah fo' ter git inter no trubble 'bout dat bill."

"Get into trouble? How can you get into any trouble? The bill was all right, and, anyhow, you didn't change it. You gave it back to me."

"Dat's truf, sah, but de coppers done foun' hit an' days er keepin' hit. Dat's wat eatin' mah heart out, sah. Wat do de coppers want wid dat bill? Lucy Miranda—dat's mah ole woman—she say dat de bill is a hoodoo, an' dat I gotter hab dat young man wat gib hit ter me go git it an' take de hoodoo off."

Nick, looking at Mannion closely, thought he observed signs of perturbation.

"Have you spoken to anyone about our transaction the other day?"

"No, sah. Ise bin erfraid ter speak, an' Lucy Miranda wouldn' tole de debble ef he was ter come in an' ast her."

Mannion drew a breath of relief. "I'll go downtown and get the bill," he said, "so don't bother your head about it any more. To tell the truth, I hadn't missed it or I would have tried to find out what had become of it."

"De coppers foun' hit near de spot whar de killin' was done," said Nick, in an awed whisper.

Mannion regarded the false negro sharply, but any suspicion that might have entered his brain was dissipated at sight of the honest, disturbed countenance of the speaker.

Mannion did not say anything for a few moments. Then he asked this question, in what was meant to be a careless manner: "Have you heard any talk about the

bill—that is, any talk in connection with the place where it was found?"

"Yes, sah, I hab," replied Nick, hesitatingly, as he cast down his eyes and fumbled with his hat. "Ise heard a heap o' talk. Some say dat de man wat drapped dat bill is sho' 'sponsible fo' de murder." Before Mannion could open his mouth Nick went on: "Yo' los' dat bill, sah, an' yo' sho' gotter fine dat killer else de coppers may git atter yo', sah."

"Come inside," said Mannion, his face now as pale as death. Nick entered and the door was closed. "Now be seated and tell me every word you have heard. This—this is terrible"—meeting Nick's look of innocent inquiry—"that the man who found that bill, which I carelessly dropped, should be the murderer the officers are looking for."

The great detective had come to Mannion's room in pursuit of a definite plan, which he had not seen fit to divulge to anyone. He might have told both Chick and Patsy, for they were to be trusted; but every detective is human, and Nick may be pardoned for desiring to give his assistants a surprise. Ever since he had looked upon the dead face of the murdered man, he had had a card up his sleeve. In examining the neck upon which the marks of cruel fingers were discernible, he had made two important discoveries—first, that the marks on the right side of the neck were heavier than those on the left side; second, that between the first and second marks, the first being that of the thumb, was a space of twice the width of each of the other spaces. It is the business of a detective, who hopes to make a success of his vocation, to seize upon what to the layman would appear as the slightest trifles. Nick Carter's eyes, trained to see every point that would aid him in the investigation of a criminal case, had let nothing escape him when he entered the morgue. Now, as in front of Arthur Mannion, he knew that he was in the presence of the murderer of James Playfair.

The heavy finger marks on the right side of Playfair's neck showed to the expert that the murderer was not only left-handed, but that the muscular power of the two hands and arms had been reversed from the ordinary. Once, while the talk was going on at the door, Mannion had shown that he was left-handed. Twice since entering the room he had made a similar exhibition. He had raised the window with his left hand, and with his left hand he dragged from a corner a heavy Morris chair.

The last point favoring Mannion was the fact that the forefinger of the left hand was missing. It was not a deformity, as Nick could plainly see. The finger had been amputated at the middle joint.

"Why don't you speak?" Mannion said, irritably, for Nick, lost in his reflections, had not answered promptly the question that had been put to him.

"Oh, yo' wan' me ter say wat de udder pe'ple say. Dat hit, sah?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I'se heahed a heap o' gossip an' an' all de talk is des one way. De killer had dat hoodoo bill."

"Is anyone suspected?"

"Yes, sah—dat man Craven is speculated."

"Craven? Who is he?"

There was apparent unconcern in the way the question was asked. And there was something more. Nick Carter, shrewd student of human nature as he was, knew that he was now treading on dangerous ground. But he cared not. He had made his point, and in a few minutes he would prepare to close in.

"Don' yo' know, sah?" looking at Mannion in a surprised way.

"No, I don't. Never heard of the man before."

"Den it was yo' double, sah, dat was talkin' to him de day ob de killin'."

Arthur Mannion, with a glint in his blue eyes, which spoke of a sudden resolution, arose to his feet and went to the wash basin. Taking a towel from the rack, he advanced toward the detective, who, divining what was coming, remained seated. One hand was in his coat pocket, the other rested on his knee. The hand had gone into the pocket while Mannion's back was turned.

With the towel concealed behind his back, Mannion came to Nick's side. Suddenly, without a word, the hand with the towel appeared, when, like a flash, out came Nick's hand from his pocket, and the villain, looking down into the muzzle of a revolver, saw sudden death and knew that his purpose was stayed.

Retreating to the middle of the room, he hissed out these words:

"I didn't need the towel to tell me you were a cursed detective in disguise."

"And I didn't need much more evidence to prove that you are the man I want," retorted Nick, in his own character. "So divest yourself of your weapons and hold out those pretty wrists. The handcuffs are ready for them. Come, be quick about it"—the voice was now stern and menacing—"and don't try to come any of your California

tricks, for at the first treacherous move I'll make a shambles out of the room."

Mannion gritted his teeth, cast a murderous glance at the triumphant man-hunter, and then, from his hip pocket, produced a silver-mounted revolver.

"It is a pity to give this up," he said, surlily, as he fondled it in his hand, without, however, turning the muzzle in Nick's direction.

"Throw it on the bed or——"

The sentence was not finished, for in an access of desperation, and in entire disregard of his personal safety, Mannion, as swift as thought almost, sent the weapon whirling through the air. It struck Nick Carter squarely on the forehead, cutting the flesh, and sent him tumbling out of the chair. The next instant, Mannion brushed past his fallen enemy, opened the door and rushed to the head of the stairs. There he hesitated, for the thought struck him at the moment that the great detective he had just left had not, probably, come to the house alone; that there were officers downstairs, ready to give assistance whenever it should be needed. Therefore, turning from the stair landing, he hurried to a vacant room fronting the street. The door was open, and he entered the room just as Nick Carter reached the corridor. The blow he had received had been a severe one; but the detective had bathed his face and head, removing the black paste that disguised him, and had not lost consciousness. Though weak and dizzy, he was fixed in the resolve to follow and arrest the murderer, no matter what the danger to himself might be.

Mannion crossed the room and was raising the window to step upon the scaffolding, when a bullet from Nick's revolver cut a lock of hair from his head. The detective could have easily killed the man, but it was not his desire to do so. Mannion must be taken alive and must be made, under the law's direction, to suffer for his crime. What the fugitive's object was in seeking the scaffolding, Nick at the time could not conjecture. But it was evident that he believed he was taking the most available way, both to escape from the house and from the detectives who might be in waiting on the sidewalk. As was afterward learned, Mannion's intention was to follow the planking of the scaffolding to the side of the house, around which it ran for a few feet, then descend into the garden and make his way through the grounds to the street in the rear.

The shot fired by the detective did not stop Mannion in his flight. It accelerated it. He was out of the window and on the planking as another bullet whizzed by his head. Chick and Patsy, who had been stationed below, around the corner of the house, saw Mannion come out of the window, and did a little pistol practice themselves, but the fugitive, who by this time must have arrived at the conclusion that bullets were harmless, kept on his way.

He was at the front end of the scaffold when Nick Carter passed through the window. The great detective saw his enemy and his lips parted in a grim smile. The man could not escape while he, Nick, was alive, and Chick and Patsy were below. "Keep an eye on him," he shouted to Chick, "and we'll get him, sure."

The words were spoken as the detective reached the planking, but the next moment something happened which was not down on Nick Carter's program. The scaffold, weakly put together, gave way, through the breaking of one of the supports, there was a crash, and then sudden death. It all happened in the twinkling of an eye, and Dimitri Goloff, who was passing on the sidewalk on his way to Mannion's room, was the victim. As the support yielded, down went Nick, his body falling with crushing weight on the head of the Russian.

CHAPTER V.

BESTED BY A WOMAN.

Chick and Patsy, with eyes of horror, saw Nick Carter fall and, forgetful of everything save the fate of their beloved chief, hurried to his side. Tears of joy were in their eyes when they saw that he was not dead, nor even badly injured. His body had struck the Russian, whose head, coming in contact with the protruding spike of a heavy board, was now still and lifeless. But the head of the detective, as well as the upper part of his body, had fallen against the hair mattress and thus been the means of saving broken bones and the preservation of a useful life. Beyond a number of painful bruises and a temporary loss of breath, Nick Carter was as good as ever.

It was some moments, however, before he could speak to Chick.

"Mannion? Where is he?" he asked.

"Patsy is following him," was the answer; "the boy, as well as myself, let him go when you fell, but as soon as Patsy saw you were not dead he rushed around the corner of the house."

"I am afraid he has given us the slip," returned Nick, disappointedly.

"Never mind," said Chick, consolingly; "we'll get him yet. By the way, do you know you have cooked the goose of one of the men you were after?"

"What! Goloff?"

"Yes."

"How? Ah! I understand. He was the man I flattened to the sidewalk."

"The same hombre, Nick. And he's dead. No more shall the ear-splitting notes of his fog-horn voice offend the senses of poor, suffering humanity."

"Have they taken his body away?"

"Not yet. But I'm looking for the patrol any minute."

The wagon soon came and Nick accompanied the driver to the morgue, leaving Chick behind to supplement the work of Patsy.

At the morgue, in due course of time, the body was searched, and forty dollars in money, some letters from San Francisco, written by Goloff's wife, and several copies of a will were the only articles deserving attention that were found.

The copies of the will were submitted to Nick by the coroner, and, in an instant, the detective's mind took in their vital significance. Here was a find indeed. There were four copies in all, and the wording of each was the same. The only points of difference—and they were slight—lay in the handwriting. Looking at and comparing them carefully, Nick's correct conclusion was that each copy was written by the same person and for the purpose of using one—the copy as perfected—as a model upon which to draft a purported genuine document. The reading of the words—the purport of the alleged will—revealed the object sought. And this is what Nick Carter read:

"This, my last will and testament, written by myself and without duress, while sound both in body and mind, [illegible] of all the property of which I may be possessed at the time of my death, I hereby declare that I am without wife or children, brothers or sisters, or any legal heirs at all. Therefore, I give and bequeath to the Foulkes' Home for Friendless Children five thousand dollars; the Smithsonian Institute, five thousand dollars; and all the rest and residue of my property, real and personal, to Arthur Mannion, son of my deceased wife; and I hereby appoint my dear friend, Jackson Feversham, to serve as executor of my will, and desire that no bond shall be required of him.

"JAMES PLAYFAIR.

"Washington, D. C., April 16, 19—."

The moment after he had handed back the papers to the coroner, Nick remained in a brown study. Soon his mind was made up as to his course of action. The finding of these copies must not be made public for a week. Much might be done in that time, perhaps the case might be ended.

Half an hour later the detective, the coroner, the local detectives and secret-service men, chiefs and subordinates were closeted together. To the assembled criminal catchers Nick exposed his hand and outlined his plans.

"Mannion knows he is suspected," he said, "but blinded by the great pecuniary interest at stake, he may conclude to remain in the city for a while. If he does he will be caught. If, however, this will business is sprung on him through newspaper publication he will understand that all is lost and that his life is not worth a candle."

"But, Mr. Carter," spoke up the coroner, "I don't understand what value as evidence against Mannion these copies of the will possess. They are evidently not copies made by James Playfair, for they would not have been found in the possession of a Russian criminal, an utter stranger to the old man. Looking upon them, then, as having been written by another man, Arthur Mannion, say, they reveal nothing more than a silly propensity to build castles in the air. If a will, worded as these copies are, should, however be produced by the executor as a genuine instrument, or, what purports to be one, and which was found among Playfair's possessions, then I could see some point to your contention."

The coroner paused. Nick, who had listened quietly and with an impassive face, replied:

"I think I can satisfy your scruples. Will you kindly step to the phone, call up Jackson Feversham and ask him to step around here? His office is not far away, and if he is in he will be with us in a few minutes."

Feversham was in his office and five minutes later made his appearance.

He was asked by Nick if any will had been found.

"Yes," was the answer.

"To whom is the property devised?"

"To me, that is, the larger portion of it. Playfair had no relatives. He was an only child and so was his father."

"What is the date of the will?"

"October seventh of last year."

"Where did you find it?"

"Among his papers, in his room."

"Had he a deposit box in any bank?"

"Yes."

"Have you examined that?"

"No. I haven't found the key, and I have concluded to procure an order of court before having the lock forced."

"You are the executor under the will made in October, are you not?"

"I am."

Having been informed by the chief of detectives that court was then in session, Nick proposed that Feversham go at once to the judge, state the exigency of the case and obtain an order for the opening of the box.

"The court can act under the assumption that there is only one will in existence, the one which is in your possession. Of course," Nick went on, "the time is too short for the institution of regular proceedings; but under the circumstances the court may appoint you special administrator and in that capacity you can go ahead."

"Yes, I think it can be done," returned Feversham, "and I'll make the attempt at once. I shan't be gone long. Will you wait here, or shall we arrange for another meeting?"

"If there is no objection," said the coroner, "we will wait."

Feversham, on account of his long residence in Washington, and his high character as a citizen and as a man, had no difficulty in procuring the temporary appointment from the court. A locksmith was found, and in less than an hour after his departure from the room which held the officers he reappeared with a bulky envelope in his hand.

Opening the envelope in the presence of the company, a number of papers, stock certificates, tax receipts, bank books, etc., and a small, sealed envelope superscribed "My last will and testament" were brought forth.

"Before you produce the will which that small envelope holds," said Nick Carter, "I will venture a prediction of its contents. You will find it to be an exact reproduction in wording and handwriting of this model"—holding out one of the will copies taken from the body of Dimitri Goloff.

The coroner's eyes widened. But he said nothing.

Jackson Feversham opened the envelope, read the will with an amazed countenance and then compared it with the copy which Nick had handed to him.

"You are right, Mr. Carter," he said. "The will I took from the envelope is a facsimile of the one you gave me. But I—I don't understand. The idea is abhorrent. I can't believe that James Playfair, in his right mind, ever made that wretch, Arthur Mannion, his heir."

"Sit down, Mr. Feversham," said Nick, with a look charged with sympathy, "and I will try to make matters clear to you and at the same time relieve your mind. And I will also try to satisfy the curiosity of our friend, the coroner. The will you found in the bank deposit box is a forgery."

"But," said Feversham, "it is in James Playfair's handwriting. I would be willing to swear to that."

"I will admit that it is an almost perfect imitation of Playfair's handwriting," replied the detective, "and that the imitation cannot probably be duplicated by any man in the United States—barring, of course, Arthur Mannion—but I cannot admit that it is genuine."

"It may be hard to prove that it is not genuine," put in the coroner.

Feversham, who, since he had last spoken had been looking closely at the handwriting of the will, nodded his head at the coroner's words. "It would deceive an expert," was his comment, given in a tone of mingled sadness and disgust. "I know Playfair's handwriting—every peculiarity of it, and there is not a flaw in this document."

"All the same," replied Nick Carter, imperturbably, "we are going to prove that it is a rank forgery. How? Mainly by these copies. Don't you see their importance? Standing alone, the will might be unassailable, but when it is opposed by these copies, which upon their face show indubitable evidence of the process by which all the peculiarities of Playfair's handwriting were reproduced—the careful steps leading from crudity to perfection—the forgery is unmasked. Why, in the hands of the veriest tyro in legal practice, the story of the cheat would be primer reading to a jury even of asses. Four copies of a will making Arthur Mannion heir to an immense fortune are found in the pockets of Arthur Mannion's confederate in crime. Who, of all persons in the world, criminally inclined, would be capable of drawing a will likely to deceive the eyes of an expert? Arthur Mannion, who probably carried away with him when he left Washington, years ago, specimens of his stepfather's handwriting. Perhaps they were letters written to himself and containing words of admonition. And the bogus will stands not only as an instrument by which Arthur Mannion hoped to come into possession of a fortune, but also as something of incalculable value as a weapon in the cause of justice. In forging that will Arthur Mannion forged the instrument of his own destruction, for the controlling motive of the murder is now explained. Revenge for Playfair's refusal to submit to blackmail, played but a small part in the murder. Mannion wanted the old man's fortune; he had paved the way to obtain it, and when the time came he removed the living obstacle from his path."

Jackson Feversham's countenance had lost its expression of gloom and disgust. His eyes were bright and a smile hovered about his lips.

"It's all clear to me now, Mr. Carter," he said, "and I want you to accept my apology for having seemed to doubt your judgment even for a moment. Your explanation goes further—it throws full light upon the robbery of Playfair's house."

The great detective inclined his head in assent. "Yes," he said, "the real purpose of the burglarious entrance into your friend's house is now shown. Mannion went there to steal the key to the deposit box, and, incidentally, to appropriate whatever articles of value he might come across. I am inclined to think that the letters found in the cash drawer were letters written by his mother to his stepfather during their courtship."

"That's it, that's it," exclaimed Feversham. "I've seen him fondling the package many a time."

"And it was the offer of Mannion to return them that made Playfair consent to the appointment by the river," continued Nick. "The case is now clear of fog. The only thing is to catch Mannion."

"It is a pity the fellow Goloff could not have lived long enough to have spoken a few words," said the Washington chief of detectives. "He might have been able to tell us where we would be likely to find his partner. By the way," he added, addressing Nick, "how do you account for Goloff's possession of those will copies?"

"By recounting the old saw, 'There is honor among thieves,' Mannion, of course, gave Goloff his confidence, and told him all about the forged will and showed him his first initiative attempts. Naturally there was a pecuniary understanding between them. It is reasonable to conclude that Mannion promised the Russian a goodly share of Playfair's fortune. But Goloff was distrustful. He wouldn't take on his partner's word; he wanted surety and he found it when he found those will copies. In his possession they would serve as a club to make Mannion come to terms, in the possible event of a disposition on Mannion's part to play the hog. It is possible, though not probable, that Mannion, in a fit of generosity, gave the copies himself to Goloff as security for the performance of the agreement he had made. In matters not, however, how Goloff procured them. The plain deduction is that they were held for the purpose I have indicated.

"And now," continued the detective, with his eyes on the coroner, "my suggestion is that the public be left in ignorance, until we have caught Mannion, both of the identity of the man killed by my fall from the scaffolding and of the discovery of the will copies. Goloff came here a stranger; it is doubtful if his name is known to anyone except myself and my assistants. It will, therefore, be an easy matter to manage the inquest so that a verdict of accidental death of an unknown man may be rendered."

The coroner, whose eyes had been opened by Nick's latest explanation and exposition, promptly fell in with the suggestion.

The chief of detectives saw no objection to the plan, and it was carried out.

"The time to look for the next move of Mannion's," were the detective's words as the assembly was about to break up, "is at the time or shortly after the will is offered for probate. It must be offered," answering Feversham's shake of the head, "for not to offer it would amount to a declaration that its spurious character has been discovered. The offer will be merely a formal matter; its admission to probate, of course, is not to be thought of. Before the day set for such action arrives I will be prepared, I hope, to produce Mr. Mannion and expose the fraud."

Shortly afterward Nick went to his rooms, hoping to find either Chick or Patsy there. Both rose to greet him as he entered.

"Lost him, did you?" he asked, looking at Patsy, whose face wore a black, angry expression.

"It wasn't my fault, sir," was his reply; "I was bested by a woman."

CHAPTER VI.

CRAVEN SPEAKS AND NICK ACTS.

"Bested by a woman?" repeated Nick, in surprise. "How was that, Patsy?"

"You have read of tiger cats, haven't you? Well, this woman was one. She is a little beauty, black-haired, black-eyed, slender, supple and sinuous, and oh, my! but her muscles are steel! I am no jellyfish myself, but she waltzed away with me, all right.

"This is how it happened, Mr. Carter: After I'd made sure that you wouldn't croak from that tumble I rushed around the corner of the house after Mr. Mannion. He was going through the garden—a regular tangle of all kinds of bushes—and I skinned after him. As he went over the fence into the next street this woman—she's a young thing, not over eighteen—hailed him and he stopped. But not for long, for, catching sight of me, he left the woman and made a lightning sprint toward the woods. Over the fence I went, to fall into the arms of the

woman. She was very affectionate, must have thought I was her long-lost brother, for she caught me around the neck and gave me a hug and a squeeze that would have made a young grizzly bear fall down with envy. Naturally I objected, but I couldn't be as forcible in my objection as I might have been under other circumstances, for I was dealing with a woman."

Nick smiled and Chick winked.

"First thing I knew she tripped me up. I wasn't looking for that sort of thing, you know, and it was only when my block bumped the ground that I realized that I was really up against a tough proposition. What did I do? Well, I had to throw her off, but tiger cats are hard customers to deal with. They are like rubber balls. You chuck them away and back they come. I am ashamed to say it, Mr. Carter, but I wasted ten minutes with that woman and only got away from her when she was quite willing that I should do so."

"Who is she?" inquired Nick.

"Give it up. She knows Mannion, though, and I'll bet a Swiss cheese against a plate of boarding house hash that she knows where Mannion has gone."

"Did you follow her?"

"I couldn't."

"Couldn't? Why not?"

"Because she did not give me a chance. She's standing there by the fence now, for all I know to the contrary. I wanted to follow her, but she knew what was in my mind, of course, and so she never moved."

"Did she say anything?"

"Oh, yes," said Patsy, rather sheepishly. "She said: 'Run home, little boy. Your mother must be anxious about you.'"

Chick burst into a laugh. Nick looked at him in mock severity. Patsy frowned and repressed an inclination to say something forcible.

"And so you lost track of your man, Patsy?" said the great detective.

"Yes, sir. I went into the woods, that is, the wooded grounds of the War College, but could neither get sight of him nor find anybody who had seen him. I told my story to the officer in charge, and men were instantly detailed to make a search."

"And that's all, eh?"

"That's all."

"Well it is well, Patsy. You have done all that could have been expected." Nick patted the boy on the back. "You have not made a winning, it is true, but it was not on account of any fault of your own. Now," turning to Chick, "have you anything to report?"

"Only this: I know where the woman who attacked Patsy holds out."

"At Craven's, on L Street, isn't it?" suggested Nick, quietly.

"Sure. But how did you discover the fact?"

"By a process of reasoning beautiful in its simplicity. The girl was seen near Craven's house. Craven knows Mannion and had a conversation with him the day of the murder. Craven will neither tell what that conversation had reference to, nor what his relationship with Mannion is. It is not a criminal relationship. I assured myself of that when I talked with Craven yesterday. The advent of the girl near Craven's house, her acquaintance with Mannion suggest a story which is probably true. She lives at Craven's because she is Craven's daughter, and both she and Craven are interested in Mannion, because she is Mannion's wife."

"You've hit it," said Chick, with admiration in his eyes.

"If she is Mannion's wife," remarked Patsy, "he caught a Tartar when he married her. But maybe she is only his sweetheart."

"No," said Nick, "for that relation would not explain Craven's conduct. Craven might consent to shield a villainous son-in-law, but he would take the opposite course if there were only an engagement to be married. I think I'll make another trip to the Craven establishment. I have a desire to see the girl as well as to have a second talk with Craven." The detective looked at his watch. It was five o'clock. "I'll start now," he announced, "and have dinner after my return. Chick, you and Patsy may as well come along. Not to go inside the house with me, but to stay outside on watch. The girl may take a notion to run out to Mannion's hiding place. If she does, Chick, you will follow her."

Prosper Craven, pale, yet composed, opened the door of his house in response to Nick Carter's knock. "I have been expecting you," he said, when the detective had entered the living room and had taken a seat. "I knew you would not be satisfied until you had learned what my attorney had advised."

"You have seen him, then?" said Nick.

"No, I have not seen him. I came to the conclusion, after you left yesterday, that I would hide nothing from you. I think the telling of the truth may be the best thing for my daughter, after all."

"Your daughter is Mannion's wife, is she not?"

Craven, showing surprise at this question, quietly answered: "Yes," she is married to that scoundrel."

"When did the marriage take place?"

"In San Francisco, two months ago. My daughter was then on a visit to her aunt. She and Mannion met at a Mission Club dance one night and took a shine to each other. Perhaps the discovery that they were both natives of Washington may have hastened the intimacy."

"Did she accompany her husband to this city?"

"No, she came as far as St. Louis with him. He had some business to transact in that city, he said, which would occupy his time for a few weeks. It was at his suggestion that she made the remainder of the journey alone. Now I am ready to answer any questions which you may desire to ask."

"Very well. To begin, what was your business with Mannion on the day of the murder?"

"He wanted me to take a message to a friend of his, a Russian."

"What was the message?"

"'Nine-thirty o'clock to-night, at place agreed upon.'"

"Did you take it?"

"Yes."

"Without understanding what it meant?"

"Without understanding it at all. I asked Mannion what it meant, and he said it was an appointment about which I could possibly have no concern."

"Did you see Mannion that night?"

"Certainly. He stayed in this house."

"At what time did he come in?"

"About midnight."

"Did you expect him?"

"No, for he had told my daughter that he was going away for a few days and would leave on the evening train. He changed his mind; but for what reason, I do not know."

"You do know, I presume, that he is suspected of the murder of James Playfair?"

"What you said to me yesterday put the idea into my head. And if he did murder Playfair I want to see him punished. Better that he should die a felon's death, even though the disgrace of his crime and punishment should fall upon me and mine, than that my daughter should ruin her life with his."

"Do you think your daughter would cleave to him if she knew what he had done?"

"She is a strange girl. She has a good heart, but she is set in her ways. She loves Mannion with all her heart and soul, and she will love him and stay by him under any and all circumstances."

"In a way," said Nick, "her character is to be admired. Heroines have been made out of poorer stuff. But I think as you do, Mr. Craven, that it is better that she should suffer while she is young than live a life of wretchedness. Mannion dead or out of the way would be a blessing which she would appreciate in later days. The man is a deadly incubus to her. Not only on her account, but because society demands it, he must be caught and punished."

"If I can help you in any way I am ready and willing to do so," said Craven, eagerly. He had been impressed by the detective's words. Nick felt that he could now be trusted.

Since entering the house he had not asked Craven as to the whereabouts of Mrs. Mannion, neither had he lowered his voice while speaking of Mannion and the murder. As a matter of fact, he had spoken in a louder tone than was usual with him, in the hope that the daughter would be a listener. It was very probable that she was somewhere about the house; and if so, her anxiety over her husband's flight and the pursuit would cause her to view with suspicion the appearance of a stranger at the door. That she would eavesdrop was to be expected. Nick, as has been stated, hoped that she would overhear what he might say to her father, for from the description of her character he believed that the eavesdropping would likely be followed by an attempt to reach her husband and warn him that he must seek the safest quarters possible.

"Let her leave the house," thought the detective, "and Chick will shadow her wherever she may go."

For the purpose of adding interest to what he had said about Mannion, Nick answered Craven's last question by saying:

"I shall be glad to have your assistance, as I shall also be glad to bring about that which will in time make your daughter a happier woman than she would be if she knew what a dastardly scoundrel her husband is. As for her marriage, it may be annulled at any time, if, as I believe, she was unaware, at the time she became his wife, that he had served a term in prison."

There was a slight, a very slight, movement behind the door opening into one of the rear apartments. The detective's sharp ears detected it and he smiled inwardly.

"She knew nothing of it, I am sure," said Craven.

Dismissing the Mannion matter, Nick talked on general matters for about ten minutes. Then, having, as he

thought, given Mrs. Mannion a chance to escape, he arose to take his departure. It was close upon six o'clock, but the sun had not set. It would not be dark for over an hour.

"By the way," said the detective, as he stood at the door, "I would like to speak with your daughter a moment."

"Very well. I will call her."

Craven went to the rear and was gone a few minutes. He returned with the announcement that his daughter was not at home.

"She was here when you came, for I left her in the kitchen to answer your knock. Gone to a neighbor's, probably,"

"It was a small matter," returned Nick. "I can see her at another time."

Outside, a block from the house, he was joined by Patsy.

"Chick's after her, Mr. Carter," he said. "They've been gone five minutes."

"Which way?"

"South."

South might mean a great many places. As it was likely that Mannion would leave Washington as soon as possible to seek a place of shelter where he might remain until he got the correct lay of the land in Washington—and this he must count upon securing through the intelligence and shrewdness of his wife—the most available section was on the Maryland side beyond Twining. That would mean the crossing of either the Anacosta or Pennsylvania Avenue bridge, unless a boat could be secured before the first-named point could be reached. From there a quick landing might be made near Poplar Point. Mannion, with his knowledge of the river, would steal a boat, if one were to be found, and Mrs. Mannion would not scruple to do the same if opportunity presented itself.

"I am afraid Chick has a big job on his hands, Patsy," was the detective's comment.

At that moment, down on Anacosta's shore, Chick and Nellie Mannion were looking into each other's eyes and smiling. They stood by a small punt and Chick had just engaged to row Mrs. Mannion across the stream.

CHAPTER VII.

STARTLING NEWS FROM BALTIMORE.

Chick, in the wife of a street Mercur, had accompanied Nick Carter to the house on L Street. From a window she had seen Mrs. Mannion emerge from the back door of Craven's house with a small bundle under her arm, which, he rightly judged, contained eatables. Looking neither to right nor left, she hurried to the first corner, turned south and almost flew along the sidewalk. Chick followed, using all the precautions of an expert shadower. Going through lanes and private grounds, she at last reached the river shore. Chick, by a detour and making lightning time, arrived at a point near the water several hundred yards in advance of his beautiful quarry. Looking up and down stream without showing himself to the woman, he saw that there was but one boat between her and the first bridge, and that was not far beyond the point where he stood and within a short distance of the river approaches to the navy yard. Intuitively, Chick knew that Mannion's wife was looking for a boat, and this one he had no sooner discovered than he made a run for it, using the bushes along the shore as a screen for his body.

Reaching it, he saw it was a punt and that it was half filled with water. With an old tin can found on the shore he was busily engaged in baling out the punt, when Mrs. Mannion, flushed and anxious-eyed, came up to him. Chick did not turn his head at her approach, though out of the corner of his eye he saw her coming.

She stopped and spoke.

"Is this your punt?"

"Sure, miss," was the response, in a rough voice, but with a kindly intonation.

"I wish to get across the river. I live beyond the point and some one has stolen my own boat. Can I engage you to paddle me over? I will pay you half a dollar."

"That's like finding money, miss," said Chick, looking into her face with a broad smile. "But as I need some coin of the realm I'll close with your offer and thank you kindly for making it. Get right in and away we'll go."

Nick's assistant was no novice at boat work. He was as much at home on the water as on land. Swiftly and dextrously he paddled across the Potomac's east branch, landing, as directed by his fair employer, a quarter of a mile below the point in the direction of Uniontown.

On the way Chick asked a question:

"What kind of a boat is the stolen one?"

"Something odd for these parts. It's a batteau which my father brought from Vermont."

"Isn't that it over there?" pointing to a flat, sharp-nosed, square-sterned boat, on the shore toward which they were proceeding.

She looked, and, without showing any surprise, said: "Yes that is the one."

And now Chick was convinced that Mannion had used the batteau and that his wife was on the way to find him.

When she found herself on the other side Nellie Mannion paid the counterfeit boatman and then turned and went rapidly up the bank. Chick saw her disappear among the trees and cautiously followed her. For half an hour he was able to keep her in sight. Then, all at once, she disappeared in the thickly wooded grounds of an old residence long deserted. The gate was gone, the fence was broken in many places, the grass grew thick in the walks and there was neglect everywhere.

Chick was hurrying through the wild tangle of weeds and bushes in the garden near the house, when a scream, fraught with direst agony, reached his ears. It came from a spot near at hand, not many yards away, and in a moment he stood by the mouth of an old well and by the side of Nellie Mannion, who, on her knees and sobbing as if her heart would break, was gazing down into the black depths of the hole.

"What is it?" Chick asked, in real concern.

Mrs. Mannion looked up, partially checked her sobbing and said, in a despairing voice:

"He's down there."

"Who is he? And how did he get there?"

Chick had not explained his presence in the grounds nor had the woman expressed any surprise at his coming. It now occurred to the young detective, while Mrs. Mannion hesitated in her answer, that he might as well try to square himself.

"I live near here," he said, unblushingly, "and I was going past the place when I heard your scream."

She seemed to pay no attention to this explanation, but said, with a renewal of her agitation: "He's down there and he may be dead. Can you not get him out?"

"How do you know anyone is down in the well?" the young man asked, as a dim suspicion crossed his mind.

"I heard his groans as I came toward the well," she replied, with every appearance of earnestness and sincerity, "and the groans stopped just before you came up."

Chick was but half satisfied with this statement. Kneeling down he looked and listened intently. There was not a sound from below. He struck a match and was in the act of using the light thus afforded to ascertain what, if anything, the well contained, when a shove given with all the force Nellie Mannion was capable of exerting—and she was anything but a weak woman—sent the brave detective into the well. There was a heavy thud, one groan and then silence.

On her feet, her heart beating like a trip hammer and her face lighted up but a moment before with murderous fire, now pale with the first touches of remorse, Nellie Mannion listened for a few moments, then, taking up her bundle from the ground, hastened with shaking limbs from the scene of her crime.

Nick Carter waited until midnight for the return of his assistant. Then in no equable frame of mind, he sought his couch.

The morning came and no Chick. Noon arrived, and still Chick had not made his appearance. During the forenoon Patsy had a been on a hunt for the missing detective, and Nick had made a search on his own account, beginning with Craven's house. There he learned, somewhat to his alarm, that Mrs. Mannion had been away since the preceding afternoon. Her father showed anxiety, though it was his opinion that his daughter had gone to join her husband, of whose hiding place she must be cognizant.

At noon Patsy reported the presence of two boats on the Uniontown side of the Anacosta, and the tracks of a man and a woman on the shore and bank. He had followed the tracks until they were lost in the grass.

In the afternoon, Nick and Patsy made an attempt to pursue the clew which Patsy had discovered. The grounds of the deserted house attracted the great detective's attention, and he was proceeding in the direction of the well when he came face to face with Nellie Mannion.

"Are you Nick Carter?" she asked, eagerly.

Under other circumstances the identity might have been denied. Nick now saw fit to give an affirmative answer.

"Then you will find your friend a few paces beyond."

Turning, she walked to the mouth of the well. Beside it lay Chick with a broken leg and a face covered with blood.

"He's not dead; he's not badly hurt," explained the woman, quickly. "His skull is not injured. Bruises and cuts have caused the blood."

"She's right, all right," spoke Chick, faintly "but I'll feel better if some one will wash my face and put my leg straight."

The great detective bent over his disabled and suffering assistant, poured his usual affectionately and kindred consoling words into his ear. Then he lifted the lad in his strong arms and started for the place. "Please," he said, "go to Inlow Mrs. Mannion to accompany us."

"I will go without compulsion," she said, meekly. "I have done all the evil that I intend to do."

Nick frowned. Perhaps she had done all that was necessary.

In crossing the river Nick and Chick used the batteau. Patsy and Mrs. Mannion took the punt.

Chick was taken to Craven's house, and a surgeon was telephoned for. An hour after the surgeon's arrival Chick was resting quietly, with his limb set and the wounds on his face and head washed and dressed.

"He will be all right in a few weeks," said the surgeon. "Nursing is all he requires."

In the evening Nellie Mannion, composed and quiet, sat before Nick Carter, as a person might sit before a prosecuting attorney.

"I have nothing to conceal," she said, "except the place where my husband is hidden. You will never find it and you will never see him again."

Her tone was so positive that Nick felt a cold chill run down his spine. But he quickly recovered his spirits, and met her look with a smile of disbelief.

"I am sorry I threw your friend down the well," she continued, "but I had to do it. I suspected him on the boat, and the scream was given to test that suspicion. If he were a detective he would follow me and my scream would bring him to my side. It did. The well offered the only opportunity to rid myself of his pursuit. Rather would I myself have died than have permitted him to follow me to my husband's place of concealment."

Her face flushed and Nick could not but admire as well as pity her.

"You came back to rescue him," he said, "and that action must go to your credit."

"I did not desire his death," she replied; "and when I had accomplished the purpose for which I had set out I returned with a rope and assisted him in getting out."

"You say that your husband is beyond your reach. Do you mean by that that he will never return to Washington?"

"That is what I mean, Mr. Carter. I will say, however, that it was not his intention to leave these parts until I told him yesterday what I knew you and my father. If I had not come to him with the news you were kind enough" here she smiled—"to furnish me he would have made his appearance in town within a week."

"If he was not afraid of arrest, why did he run away?" queried the detective.

"On account of a temporary scare. After considering the matter he concluded that you had no hold on him that would stand in court, and he would have chanced arrest if I had not given him to understand that you knew more about him than he had given you credit for knowing."

Nick scanned her face, lovely in its heightened color, saw the undying resolve in her eyes, and sighed.

"And you—you have done all that for a red-handed murderer," he said, with severity.

"He is my husband," she said, simply, her eyes meeting his without a quiver.

"Arguments, then, would be thrown away."

"Entirely so. You look at the case from one side, I from the other. You do not know all the facts."

"And you are in possession of them, eh? Would it be presumption to ask you to give your side, or rather your husband's side, of the story?"

"No, it would not be presumption, but I cannot give you any information. My story, or his, you would laugh at, so what is the use of telling it?"

Nick made up his mind that Mannion had, in vulgar parlance, given her a "fill," and that she, in her love and faith, had swallowed what had been given her as gospel truth. Therefore, he did not pursue the subject.

For several weeks after the rescue of Chick, Nick Carter used every means within his power to discover the hiding place of Arthur Mannion, but without avail. Nellie Mannion never left her father's house during all that time, except to visit a neighbor or make necessary purchases at nearby stores. Court action on the will had been indefinitely postponed, Nick believing that at some time, near or far, the will would furnish the clew that would unearth the murderer.

Chick made rapid recovery, and in less than a month was on the street. Nick was then in New York, having been called to his home by business demanding his attention. One forenoon, about two months after the escape of Mannion, as he sat in his office, a telegraph boy handed him this message from Washington:

"See afternoon papers to-day. Dispatch just come Baltimore, saying Mannion dead in hospital.—CHICK."

CHAPTER VIII.

PETER MANNION COMES ON DECK.

It goes without saying that one of the first to buy a paper that afternoon was Nick Carter. Eagerly he scanned the telegraphic columns until he found what he sought. Dated from Baltimore, the item read as follows: "Last night, at St. Luke's Hospital, a patient who had

been under the care of the doctors for several weeks, passed away. Upon his arrival he had given the name of William Jonas, but a few hours before he died he confessed that his true name was Arthur Mannion, and that the police wanted him for the murder of James Playfair, the Washington millionaire. He stoutly asserted his innocence, called upon God to hear his word and died with the name of his wife on his lips."

The great detective very coolly folded the paper and placed it in his pocket. He was not dumfounded over what he had read, though his brow was wrinkled as he walked toward his residence.

He was a passenger that evening on the B. & O. train for Baltimore, and the next morning was at St. Luke's Hospital. The superintendent received him rather coolly, but upon hearing his name became affable at once.

"Can I see the body of the man Mannion who died here night before last?" Nick inquired.

"Unfortunately, no. The bu[illegible] took place yesterday. It was an aggravated case of typhoid, and we got him underground as soon as possible."

"Did he have any personal property behind?"

"Yes. Two hundred dollars in bank notes, each of one hundred dollars, several letters from his wife, addressed to him under the name of Jonas, and a few other pocket articles."

"Will you allow me to read the letters?"

"Certainly. They are in my drawer here. I am waiting to hear from his wife. She was notified yesterday morning, and an answer signed by her father came back, which stated that the loss of her husband's death had prostrated her and that she was threatened with brain fever."

The letters were three in number, and all were written within the fortnight preceding the death.

Taking the earliest date, Nick read with avowed interest:

"My Dear Husband: Each day is more lonesome since your departure. I shall go mad if things do not turn out as you have planned. Get well quick. Make those nasty doctors take a special interest in your case. Offer them the highest inducement, and if you can't fulfill any agreement you make with them, let me know and I will help you if I have to sell the gown off my back. That hateful Mr. Carter is here yet, but from what he told father the other day I think he will have to leave York in a day or two. We've pulled the wool over his eyes so thoroughly that he is as harmless as a dove. Chick, your mum, is down well. He is a good fellow, and I don't think he bears any grudge against me. But Patsy—you remember Patsy, don't you?—He's the boy I told you about—he takes no stock in me. He told me so the other day. He had the impudence to say this to my face. 'Young woman,' said he, 'I wouldn't trust you further than I can sling a cat.' I laughed at him. I could afford to. Now do as I tell you. Get well and—you know what our plan is. Lovingly your own

"Nellie."

The second and third letters, showed the writer's anxiety over her husband's condition, which had become serious. In the last letter she said if he was not better at the end of a week she would take him to Philadelphia, and place him under the care of a noted specialist.

Nick returned the letters to the superintendent and then asked for the bank notes. As he had expected, they belonged to the batch stolen from the body of Cora Reesey. "With what was Mannion afflicted when he came to the hospital?" was his next question.

"A complication of diseases, brought on by exposure. He looked like a tramp when he arrived, and said that for many days he had been sleeping in barns, sheds and on the ground. Typhoid set in a week ago."

"Can you give me a description of his person, not omitting any physical peculiarity?"

"Yes. He was tall, thin, dark-featured, black-haired—he wore no mustache, had shaved it off, he said—and half of the forefinger of his left hand was missing."

Nick's brow clouded for a moment. Then from the innermost corner of his brain crept an idea. "Doctor," said he, "have you given me a complete description of the dead man? Was there not some artificial mark on his left arm?"

"Yes, I had forgotten," replied the superintendent, apologetically. "There was a castle tattooed on his arm."

"I thought so. One more question and I am done. Did Mannion have any visitors, friends, while he was in the hospital?"

"One, his uncle, who came a few days before the typhoid symptoms appeared. Mannion said the uncle was the only blood relative he had."

"Did they hold long conversations?"

"On the first visit they had a long talk. After that they had not much to say to each other."

"Was the uncle an old man?"

"Sixty at least, though he has no gray hairs. An old soldier, I should say, for he was as straight as an arrow and had but one arm, taken off close to the shoulder."

"What name did he give?"

"Peter Mannion."

"Were you prepossessed in his favor?"

"Very much so. He was, or appeared to be, a perfect gentleman."

That evening Nick was in Washington. After a long talk with Chick he retired to pass a restless night. The next morning Chick left the city, taking the Baltimore train, but getting off at Beltzville. Patsy, by another route, left Washington in the afternoon.

A few days afterward, while Nick was at Prosper Craven's house, at which he had been a constant visitor, a tall, handsome, elderly man was ushered in by Nellie Mannion, who, the day before, had risen from a sick bed.

"Father," said she, "this is the uncle of Arthur. He lives near Baltimore and has come to see me."

Nick Carter did not remain in the house but a few moments after the uncle's arrival. Excusing himself he went out to give utterance to a soft whistle.

The uncle bore no resemblance to Arthur Mannion outside of the eyes. There was some similarity in shape, position and expression. But Mannion's hair was black. This man's was light brown. Mannion had full, red lips. This man's were thin and bloodless. Mannion had a sharp nose; this man's was broad and full. This man's voice was heavy and harsh. Mannion's was a light, musical one. There were other points of dissimilarity, but still the relationship might exist. Nick noticed that the uncle wore no sleeve to hide the loss of his arm. From appearances the arm had been amputated at the shoulder joint. "And yet, and yet," muttered the detective under his breath, but without going further.

Chick returned three days later.

"Got it?" asked Nick, with no endeavor to hide his eagerness.

"Yes. Luck was with me. I traced Mannion from the time he left Beltzville until he arrived in Baltimore."

Chick did not remain in Washington but a few hours. Another mission of importance took him away. After his departure, Nick called on Jackson Feversham. He did not tell the murdered man's friend all he knew and suspected, for the detective was a stickler for the preservation of the dramatic unities. But he did say this:

"Arthur Mannion is not dead. Preparations are making for a [illegible] If the conspirators knew what we know about the will, the attempt would never be made. But thanks to the coroner and the local officials, the secret of the copies has been kept, and, before many days, somebody representing Arthur Mannion will appear in court and ask first to have that bogus will admitted to probate, and second to have some person—I can name him—appointed administrator of Mannion's estate, the estate, of course, being the property which is mentioned in the will drawn in his favor."

"Who is this person who will represent Mannion?"

Nick told Feversham about the uncle. "Peter Mannion is the man. He came to Washington to see his nephew's wife, of course, but principally for the purpose of getting hold of the Playfair property. Mannion himself, being wanted for murder, could not appear. So the scheme that he should die was concocted."

"He is in hiding somewhere not far from here, I suppose?"

"That is my opinion. And he will know every move that will be made in his behalf. It is a pretty plot, a bold plot, but it hasn't the slightest chance to win."

"How did you discover it? And are you sure that the person who died in the Baltimore hospital was not Arthur Mannion?"

"When I read the announcement of the death," said Nick, "my suspicions were aroused. Frauds of this kind are no new thing. The criminal records, both of America and Europe, are full of them. I had been waiting for Mannion or his friends to make some move, and the death scheme, under the circumstances, seemed just the thing. I went to Baltimore, puzzled as to the manner in which the fraud had been accomplished, but after my visit to the hospital, I had the whole thing before me as clear as day. Some of the details, are, as yet, unknown to me, but the fraud itself, the purpose for which it was perpetrated, the plan of conduct which it suggests, all were revealed. Peter Mannion, acting for Arthur Mannion, arranged the cunning deception, and I must say his work shows the hand of a master artist. The fellow who died was a petty thief, Knocker Jilson, whom I had known in New York, and who of late years has been hoboing it about the country. He must have fallen in with Arthur Mannion while Mannion was journeying under cover from Washington to Baltimore. Jilson fell sick and went to the hospital, went there, of course, with Mannion's money. But the scheme to trick the officers and the public was not

broached to Jilson until he saw death in the near distance. It must have suggested itself to Mannion when he saw that Jilson, like himself, had half of his left forefinger missing, and that there was a resemblance between the two men in height, color of hair and general appearance. What inducements were offered I can only guess. But I don't think I will be far out of the reckoning when I say that the offer meant pecuniary assistance to some relative of Jilson's, probably an old mother, whom he had neglected in her days of adversity. As it might be unsafe for Arthur Mannion to appear at the hospital and see that the fraud was carried out, the work fell upon the shoulders of Peter, who appears to possess all the qualifications necessary for the purpose. But there was one thing that escaped the notice of the conspirators—the tattooing on Jilson's arm. It could never have been observed, otherwise there would have come a hitch in the proceedings. But the tattooing kills the fraud, for, with the missing finger, it positively identifies the dead man as Jilson."

"When do you purpose exposing the plot, Mr. Carter?" asked Feversham.

"On the day set by the court for hearing the application which I feel assured Peter Mannion will make. Probate day is to-morrow. We must be in court when it opens, but not where Peter Mannion can see us. If I am not mistaken, he will appear to-morrow, for he is not the man to permit the grass to grow under his feet."

Nick's prediction came true. The next forenoon, after court opened, Peter Mannion, accompanied by a lawyer of shady reputation, appeared, a will purporting to have been made by Arthur Mannion and witnessed by Prosper Craven and Elmer Newton, a neighbor of Craven's, was presented for probate. By the terms of this will all the property possessed by the alleged decedent was bequeathed to Nellie Mannion, the wife, Peter Mannion, the uncle, being named as sole executor. As the instrument was in due form it took the usual course, being set for hearing on the next court day. Then the matter of Playfair's will was taken up at the suggestion of Peter Mannion's attorney and the hearing set also for the next court day.

On reaching his room after the courtroom incidents, Nick found Patsy. "And your mission. Did it succeed?" questioned the great detective.

"It was too easy," replied Patsy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DETECTIVE FALLS INTO A TRAP.

"I got in with a mob of hoboes at Patapsco," said Patsy. "I know their holes, and when I left the train at Patapsco town and went toward the river, I felt sure I'd strike 'em. And what do you think? The main biker in South Second Johnny, who used to be trainboy on the Boston & Albany. The minute I bumped into I knew the game was mine. Inside of five minutes he handed me out a dope about Jilson and Mannion that put me on velvet. Both these guineas were with the gang, Mannion for a few days, Jilson for several weeks. Johnny said Jilly and Mannion—the hoboes called him Serious Silas—had their blocks together about all the time. One day he saw Serious writing a letter for Jilly. The letter, he afterward discovered, was to Jilly's mother, who lives in Hagerstown. Did I go to Hagerstown? Cert. And I found the old lady. She is over seventy, sickly and a washerwoman. Had she heard from her son lately? Her old, honest, patient face lit up with a smile that was heavenly in its sweetness. Yes, indeed, she had heard from the dear boy, who had forsaken his evil ways and was now at honest work in Baltimore. He had not forgotten his old mother, for during the past month he had sent her one hundred dollars. And what was better still, he was on the way to making a lot of money all in a heap, and when he had made it he intended to send enough to keep her for the rest of her life. Then she broke down and cried, but the tears were tears of joy. My eyes were wet, too, and I could not say a word to undeceive her."

"You are a good boy, Patsy," said Nick, with a look of approbation, "and I'll see that Mrs. Jilson gets the money she is expecting."

The days came and went. Chick appeared, remained a day and went off again. Patsy made several trips out of the city. Nick remained like a spider watching its web. On the afternoon of the day preceding the probate day, upon which so much depended, the detective and Patsy were sitting in the E Street room, talking over matters pertaining to the morrow's program.

The windows of the room overlooked the street. The detective, while talking to Patsy, was seated near one of the windows and he had occasionally looked out. As Patsy was preparing to go out, Nick's eye, turning toward the street, fell upon the form of Peter Mannion, who, cane in hand and with soldierly dignity, was walking along the opposite sidewalk. He glanced up once, saw Nick's face, and then quickly turned his head. The appearance of the man in that quarter, while it might not mean anything, yet gave rise in Nick's mind to a suspicion that the uncle was out for a purpose. Although Peter Mannion might think that the scheme upon which he was working was perfect in all its details, yet the presence in Washington of the noted detective, Nick Carter, on the day preceding the calling of the probate cases, would have a disquieting effect upon his nerves. Nick said a few quick words to Patsy, who at once put on his hat, left the room, and went down the stairs.

The boy did not follow Peter Mannion, but went unconcernedly up the street toward the railway depot. He walked slowly, and Nick, without showing his face to passers-by in the street, saw that the uncle had taken note of Patsy, had turned about and was now following him. The detective's face showed satisfaction. What the next

act on the program would be he could not guess, but that there was an act, scheduled for near performance, he would have staked his existence.

The day passed without incident. Toward dark, Nick went out and had dinner in a Pennsylvania Avenue restaurant. After his refreshment he walked about enjoying his cigar, and the calm, soft night. He was standing on the marble walk of the little triangular square at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Seventh Street, listening to a colored quartet, the singing adjunct of an outdoor gospel meeting, when Peter Mannion passed him. Nick did not turn his head, and he was satisfied that the uncle was going on under the impression that he had not been observed. Where was he going? Nick became a shadower, and when he saw the uncle disappear through the double doors of the Metropolitan Hotel, a look of disappointment crept into his face. All at once an idea, containing a queer suggestion, came to him. Egress from the rear of the hotel would take a person either on to John Marshall Avenue or C Street, and by either route there was a short and easy walk to the detective's quarters on E Street.

Hurrying around the corner, Nick saw no sign of his quarry on the avenue. He then hastened to C Street. Peter Mannion was nowhere in sight. Perhaps he had not had time to get there. The detective in the dark shade cast by the sidewalk trees waited for ten minutes, his observation covering both ways of departure from the hotel premises. Then he went to the hotel, entered the office, which held only the clerk and several colored *attachés,* and asked if a person, describing Peter Mannion, had been in that evening. The reply of the clerk was that the gentleman referred to had engaged a room for the night, and had then gone out.

"By the front way?"

"Yes."

"I may have been making a mountain out of a mole-hill," thought Nick, as he went out, "but I don't like the look of things. Peter has a card to play, and I will confess that he is a deeper man than I imagined."

Arrived at the stairway leading to his rooms, he scrutinized it carefully from top to bottom. No trap there. In the corridor above his searching eye again came into play. All was as it should be. Before his own door he paused and listened. Silence within. Then with his pass-key he unlocked the door and threw it open, but did not enter. The lights inside were out, but the illumination from the street enabled him to see that everything appeared to be as he had left it. True he could not see into the closet, but, stooping, he could see under the bed. He was in this posture when the door of a room on the opposite side of the corridor opened quickly, a man sprang out and with uplifted sandbag struck the detective a powerful blow on the head. Nick flattened out and did not move. Swiftly the body of the unconscious detective was dragged into his room and the door closed and locked. Fifteen minutes later Nick opened his eyes to find that he could neither move nor speak. His enemy had restored him to consciousness, but had taken the precaution to bind and gag him.

The room was now full of light, and Nick, with aching head but with clear sense, saw that he had fallen a victim to the wiles of Peter Mannion.

The uncle, seated in an easy-chair, looked at the disgruntled man hunter with an evil smile.

"You did not realize what you were up against?" the harsh voice jeered. "Thought you had a farmer in tow, I suppose. Well, you might have made the proper crack at Arthur, if he had been alive, but you are no match for the mature individual who is now before you."

Nick clinched his hands. It was all he could do. He would have gritted his teeth, but the gag was in the way.

"I don't know as this move of mine was required," Peter Mannion went on, "for I think the game is in such shape that even Nick Carter could not have checkmated it. But it's best to have the ground entirely clear. You were obnoxious; the sight of you at Craven's the other day offended my sense of proportion. You don't fit into the picture. To-morrow is my day, and butters-in are barred."

The uncle lighted a cigar, and, stooping over, deliberately blew smoke into his captive's face. Nick blinked his eyes, but the glance he gave his tormentor was cool and defiant.

"You are probably consoling yourself with the idea," pursued Peter Mannion, with easy assurance, "that your smart friend, Chick, will play your hand in case you are unable to do so. Don't think it. It's not on the program. Chick may come here to-morrow—I reckon he will—but he will not find you here. He will, however, find a note in your dear handwriting, informing him that you have struck a clew which clinches the whole business beyond the possibility of a doubt, and that he must come to your assistance without the delay of a moment. The note will further state that you are to be found on the outskirts of Georgetown about a mile below the big bridge and at a boat landing, with boat all ready for a sail. Will Chick bite? Of course he'll bite. Chick is impulsive. Even if he suspected a trap he would go, for Chick is devoted to you and would brave any danger for your sake. How do I know this? Through Nellie, my niece-at-law. Chick talked himself nearly blind while he was staying at Craven's house. He did not give anything away, but he said lots of nice things about you. Wish I could do the same, but I can't. You are not nice in my eyes."

There was a soft expression on the great detective's face. His thoughts were of Chick. But when this passed, alarm did not follow. On the contrary, a calm, deadly look shone in his eyes.

"As for Patsy," resumed Peter Mannion, with a con-

temptuous wave of the hand, "he's a boy and doesn't count. Besides, he's out of the way, for I was at the depot to-day and saw him buy a ticket for New York. And if he does come back here within a week it will be an easy job to fix him. This is the note which will settle Mr. Chick," he concluded, as he took from his pocket a folded paper and held it, opened, before Nick's eyes.

It bore evidence of having been written hurriedly, but the handwriting was a masterly imitation of the great detective's.

"Don't imagine that I did it," said Peter Mannion, "for such tricks are beyond me. But there's a smart little girl down at Craven's who spent a whole day in dressing up that document. How did she get a specimen of your hand? your eyes ask. Luck gave it to her. Chick's clothes, when they were changed, shed a note which you had written to him, and Nellie picked it up from under the bed after he had left the house. There was nothing in the note of value to us outside the handwriting."

The uncle might be lying or he might be telling the truth. Nick had his own opinion on the matter, but he could not express it, and he would not have expressed it if he could.

"I suppose you are wondering what fate is in store for you?" showing his teeth in a diabolical smile. "It is the fate of the interferer. To-morrow morning you will sleep at the bottom of the Potomac. The prospect doesn't seem to frighten you. Well, I'll give you credit for being a thoroughbred. Pity you hadn't been born with a little more sense. Yes, you're booked for fish bait, all right, and this is how I'll do the job. That big trunk there in the corner"—pointing to a Saratoga—"will hold you fast and sure. A little after daybreak to-morrow morning, an expressman will come for it. He will deposit it near the Mt. Vernon wharf, from which it will be conveyed to a small launch. On board that launch will be your humble servant, and, after an hour's trip down the river, the launch will return without the trunk. Am I explicit enough for your understanding?"

Nick nodded his head, and Peter Mannion thought he saw his face blanch with fear and dread.

"Everything," the villain went on as he blew a wreath of smoke toward the ceiling, "has been arranged with care. The landlady of this flat is unsuspicious. She is a German, and she is resting under the belief that I am your elder brother. She did not see me as you see me now. Oh, no, Nicholas, not for your honey boy. She talked with a very old man, with two arms—thanks to this wig and these whiskers"—taking them from his pocket—"and this sensible arm"—picking it up from the floor—"and if the man ran to out, she will again see the same good person of unsuling innocence. I have nothing more to say at this moment except to remark that I shall remain here with you until four before daylight. Then I shall put you into the trunk, stuff the blank places with pillows and sheets, lock the trunk, take away the key and leave you for the kind offices of the expressman."

And so the night passed. Nick Carter suffered, how much he never told, for he was not one to expose his scars. The cords hurt his wrists and ankles, and the gag was a source of torture. But he bore it all without a sign of distress, and there was nothing of the craven in his pale face when at daylight he was lifted and doubled up into the Saratoga trunk.

Peter Mannion's words, as he left the room, were these:

"We shall never see each other again. I leave you with this reflection to make more bitter your last hours on earth: For the first time in your life you have bumped up against a smarter man than yourself. Ta! ta!"

CHAPTER X.

DEFEAT IN THE HOUR OF TRIUMPH.

A well-dressed man, with white hair and whiskers, occupied a stool in front of a fruit stand opposite Nick Carter's rooms from eight o'clock until half-past nine on the morning following the trunk episode. The man was Peter Mannion, and he was making sure that Chick was not in town at the time of the opening of the court. At half-past nine a telegraph boy appeared. He went quickly up the stairway of the house where Nick had lodged, and before his return to the street he was stopped by Peter Mannion. "If you have a telegram for Mr. Carter," he said, "I will take it and sign for it. Here is my authority," and he produced a card upon which was written: "Deliver to bearer all letters, notes and telegrams for me that may come to-day—giving the date. Nicholas Carter." The boy, without hesitation gave up an envelope containing a telegram. When the book had been signed Peter Mannion opened the telegram, which was dated Frederick, Md., and read: "Will be with you seven o'clock to-night. C. Carter."

"Good, good," and the villain rubbed his hands gleefully. "Everything is coming our way. Nick Carter is at the bottom of the river, and Chick, who will go to join him, will not be here to interfere with the court business. The prospect could not be better. And now to prepare for court."

At ten o'clock Peter Mannion and his lawyer entered the courtroom. They were followed by Prosper Craven and Elmer Newton, the witnesses to Arthur Mannion's will. There were but few spectators present, for there had been no public intimation that the proceedings that day would be of special interest.

Just as the calendar was being called, Jackson Feversham, accompanied by two smart-looking business men, both strangers to Peter Mannion, entered and took seats just outside the bar.

The first matter taken up was that of the will of Arthur Mannion. Craven and Newton were sworn and the fact

elicited that the will had been signed at Craven's house in the presence of the witnesses and of Arthur Mannion. It had then been delivered into the keeping of Nellie Mannion.

There being no objection, an order was made admitting the will to probate.

"So far, so good," thought Peter Mannion. "And now for the will as is a will, the will that means millions to Nellie Mannion and her dear ones."

Rising to his feet, the uncle's attorney now made a motion that the matter of the will of James Playfair be taken up. "It must be judged by itself, as the court is aware," said the attorney, somewhat pompously, and glaring at Jackson Feversham, "for it is an olographic will, one which does not require the signature of witnesses. Having once proved that the will is in the handwriting of the deceased Washingtonian, the court must admit it to probate."

The attorney sat down and the judge took up the will, examined it, turned it over, and then said:

"Produce your witnesses."

"To prove the handwriting?"

"Of course. What else?" said the court, sharply.

"Then," said Peter Mannion's attorney, "I will ask Mr. Feversham to take the stand."

James Playfair's friend looked surprised, but he came forward, was sworn, and the will was placed in his hands.

"Examine it carefully, Mr. Feversham," said the attorney, "and then state whether or not, in your opinion, the body of the instrument and the signature, all the writing in fact, is in the writing of James Playfair."

"If this is not his handwriting," answered Feversham, after a pause, "it is a perfect imitation."

"Can you say it is not his handwriting?" questioned Peter Mannion's attorney, with sternness.

There was a pause. Feversham looked at the judge, then at the two men who had accompanied him to the court. Finally he said, slowly, but with emphasis: "I can say, with a conviction that almost amounts to certainty, that this will is not in the handwriting of my deceased friend."

Peter Mannion started violently. His face grew gray. A sense of danger suddenly possessed him. But he gripped the sides of his chair, and waited.

The attorney for the moment was nonplused. He had not expected the answer. But he speedily recovered his wits, and, in a blustering manner, said:

"Is it because the will leaves you nothing, while a previous one leaves you heir to the fortune, that you are unwilling to state what must be a patent fact to any man of intelligence?"

Feversham's fine face darkened with anger. He was about to reply, when the judge spoke with severity.

"You must not insult your own witness. If I hear any thing of the kind again I shall be compelled to fine you for contempt of court. Have you any more questions to ask?"

"Yes," was the surly reply. "I wish to ask Mr. Feversham why he is positive that this will is not what it purports to be?"

"My attorney, who has just arrived, will answer for me," said the witness.

Both Peter Mannion and his attorney turned to see advancing toward the bar the tall, courtly figure of Col. Seaman, one of the leaders of the Washington bar.

"It is our intention," said the colonel, to the court, "to contest the probate of this alleged olographic will. I have in my hands copies of the same document, which I respectfully ask the court to examine, before I proceed to explain where and how they were found and what they mean."

Thus saying, he stepped within the bar, approached the bench and handed to the judge the four copies found on the body of Dimitri Goloff, the Russian accomplice of Arthur Mannion.

The judge examined them, first with perplexity, then with understanding.

"As supplementing them," continued Col. Seaman, "I will offer for your inspection a copy of the indictment under which Arthur Mannion was convicted in a California court of forgery." This document was passed to the judge.

Peter Mannion shifted uneasily in his seat. His brow began to ooze cold perspiration.

"Anything more?" asked the court, pleasantly.

"Yes, your honor. Here are four affidavits declaring that on the date of the alleged will in favor of Arthur Mannion, that young man was in St. Louis."

"Well, what of that?"

"If you will hold up the will and the copies you will see that the water mark is 'St. Louis Mills.'"

The judge did so with the remark: "You are right, Col. Seaman, and while the circumstance taken alone is of little consequence, when considered with other circumstances, it may prove to have weight."

"I think the weight will be shown when we produce reliable witnesses who will swear that for years James Playfair used but one kind of paper and that of Baltimore make."

"Where were these will copies found?"

"Ask Mr. Feversham, your honor. He is on the stand, and he has been sworn."

The question was asked and Feversham answered: "In the pockets of a dead man."

"His name?"

"Dimitri Goloff, who was the criminal associate of Arthur Mannion, and who accompanied Mannion from San Francisco. They were together in Washington until Goloff met his death by accident."

Peter Mannion could scarcely breathe, so great was his agitation. It was in his mind to rise and make a bolt from the room, but his limbs seemed to have lost their power of motion.

"The proceedings thus far have been somewhat irregular," remarked the court. "I presume that you are ready to proceed formally, unless there is objection from the other side."

Peter Mannion's attorney cast at his client a look full of disgust and said nothing. He was ready to throw up the case.

"Before doing so," said Col. Seaman, suavely, "I desire to say that we shall need a subpœna for a Baltimore witness, Dr. Haswick, the superintendent of St. Luke's hospital."

"What do you expect to prove by him?" asked Peter Mannion's attorney, in marked curiosity.

"We expect to prove that the man who died there a short time ago and who was buried as Arthur Mannion was not Arthur Mannion, but one Jonas Jilson, a petty thief and tramp. By other witnesses we shall prove that Arthur Mannion is still alive."

The colonel ceased speaking. Peter Mannion shaking as if with the ague, his eyes bloodshot and his lips blue and trembling, arose to his feet and staggered toward the door. No one stayed him until he neared the two men who had entered with Jackson Feversham. Both rose when the discomfited villain was within a few feet of them. Then acting simultaneously, they stepped forward and each seized a wrist of the fleeing man.

"Don't go," said one of them, in a voice that made the wretch's heart stop beating, "for you may consider yourself under arrest, Mr. Arthur Mannion, for the murder of James Playfair."

The speaker was Nick Carter and his assistant was Chick.

CHAPTER XI.

SHOWS HOW NICK WON OUT.

Arthur Mannion, splendidly disguised as he was, utterly collapsed at Nick Carter's denunciation, and he said not a word as he was led away, handcuffed, to the police station.

Jackson Feversham, who had been kept in the dark regarding the identity of the one-armed man, could not believe that the murderer of Playfair was the soldierly person who had represented himself to be the murderer's uncle.

"Why, he's one-armed, there's no sham there, his hair is light, his features are different, and he speaks in a different voice. I remember Arthur Mannion well, and this man bears no resemblance to him."

"All the same," said Nick, stoutly, "I can prove that he is Arthur Mannion, and before twenty-four hours he will confess that he is!"

Playfair's friend and executor was now in Nick's rooms. The other persons present were Chick and Patsy.

The detective spoke with such conviction that Feversham was impressed.

"How did you get at the secret?" he asked.

"By work, by using the powers which nature gave me and which experience has sharpened, and by the invaluable assistance of Chick and Patsy. I suspected the uncle when I heard of his visit to the hospital, my suspicions were deepened when I first met the man at Craven's house. He had but one arm, that is true, but it struck me as a singular circumstance that the missing member should be the left one, the arm to which, upon Arthur Mannion, when I had last seen him, was attached a hand with half a finger missing. An accident would account for the amputation, and if an accident to Mannion had occurred within a radius of one or even two hundred miles, the fact could be easily ascertained, both through telegraphic and private inquiry. I tried the private way first, and within a week Chick lit upon the surgeon who amputated Arthur Mannion's arm. While on his way, traveling mainly by night, from Alexandria to Baltimore, Mannion fell under a freight train. He was stealing a ride with some hoboes, and being awkward at brake-beam work, slipped and fell. The accident happened near a station—I had looked for the very thing—and a railway surgeon removed the arm and had the patient, who gave an assumed name, removed to St. Luke's Hospital, Baltimore. In the hospital Mannion met Knocker Jilson, a tramp he had struck up an acquaintance with while both were on the road. Do you begin to see, Mr. Feversham?"

"Yes, light is breaking fast. You are a very shrewd man, Mr. Carter. Hereafter I shall take whatever you say as the law and gospel."

"Before leaving the hospital Mannion arranged his deal with Jilson. The fellow was booked for an early death, and as he grew weaker he thought of his mother, whom for years he had shamefully neglected. Mannion saw his chance. He offered to send Mrs. Jilson money, and to provide for the few years she has yet to live, if Jilson, on his part, would consent to a harmless deception. Jilson listened and consented. He would have done more if it had been necessary, than was asked of him, for the promise to relieve his mother's necessities was an inducement that would have made him swallow any kind of bait.

"After Mannion was discharged as cured, he proceeded to make the next move in the game. I suppose you know, Mr. Feversham, that there are now many surgeons, professionals and quacks, who make a specialty of changing facial appearance. Twenty years ago the thing was almost unheard of. Now, there have been so many demonstrations that the practice is carried on to an extent that would amaze you were you to be furnished with the statistics. There is one of these practitioners in Balti-

more. I sent Chick to investigate. He proved the correctness of my theory, and he brought back these."

The detective from his pocketbook took two small photographs and handed them to Feversham. One was a counterfeit full-length presentment of Arthur Mannion as he appeared before the disguise, but after the amputation, and, facially, as Nick had seen him at the house on L Street; the other was a reproduction of the person of the so-called Peter Mannion.

"'Before taking,' and 'After taking,'" said Nick, with a smile. "Do you understand? And do you notice that each picture is of a one-armed man?"

"Yes. One was taken when the patient arrived; the other when the operation had been performed. If I used slang I should say it is a dead give-away," said Feversham.

"It is nothing else. Surgery fixed the features and changed the workings of the vocal chords, while chlorine or peroxide of hydrogen altered the color of the hair and eyebrows. Besides all this, I have other evidence of a minor nature which goes to cement the case against Arthur Mannion."

"What you have offered is sufficient, Mr. Carter. It is evidence overwhelming in its nature. Confront your prisoner with it and he must confess."

That is what Nick did. The next day he called at the jail, had an interview with Mannion, told him what proofs had been gathered, both of the impersonation and of the murder, and the result was that the wicked stepson of James Playfair threw up his hands and made full confession.

He had, as the great detective supposed, robbed Playfair's house in order to obtain the key to the bank deposit box. He found the key, and he found something more—the money and a package of his mother's letters in the locked drawer. The letters were used as a lure for the appointment by the river and the murder was committed with deliberate intent, Goloff assisting by holding Playfair's arms while Mannion choked the old man to death.

The scheme of the bogus will had been concocted in St. Louis, where Mannion had, by previous arrangement, met Goloff, who had left San Francisco a week before the departure of Mannion and his wife from that city. The forgery had not been a difficult task, for Mannion was an expert in that line, and he had some of Playfair's old letters as a guide.

Asked about the notes taken from the body of Cora Reesey, Mannion answered: "I might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, so I'll say that I robbed the body. I was the first to discover it. I was rowing along the shore when I spotted it. There was no one in sight, and so I took all the valuables I could find. Goloff was with me, and I whacked up with him.

"And now," said Mannion, when he had finished his confession, "it's up to you to do a little explaining. How in the name of Satan did you get out of that trunk?"

Nick Carter smiled. He could afford to. "I wasn't in that trunk more than two minutes," he said. "But it was lucky for me that help came when it did, else I should have suffocated. Do you suppose that I was such a ninny as to run blindfold into the trap you had set for me? You spoke rather sneeringly of my boy Patsy, while you had me at a disadvantage in the room. Let me tell you now that you owe Patsy an apology, for he is responsible for my presence in the court to-day and your arrest. When I sent him out in the daytime, it was not for the purpose of taking a train out of the city, but to pipe you. Now you begin to see? He bought a ticket for New York, but he rode only a few blocks, then jumped off the train and carried out my other instructions. He saw you go up the stairs—he was concealed across the street—and he saw me go up. Then he followed suit. With ear at the keyhole he overheard every word you said to me. He was too shrewd to go out and procure assistance, for he saw that the only way to block your game would be to let you fancy that you had really sent me to the bottom of the Potomac. You did send something—a trunk that cost me sixty dollars, and a couple of pillows and a lot of bricks that I threw in to give the proper weight."

Mannion bit his lips till the blood came. But he soon assumed a devil-may-care expression.

"I was too anterior; I see it now. And I suppose that telegram from Chick was a plant."

"Of course. Chick was only a few miles away, I had him at the phone before eight o'clock, and his part was soon arranged. I presume you thought the boy who gave you the telegram was a regular employee of the company?"

"Wasn't he?"

"Oh, no. He was only Patsy."

"Patsy!" And what the checkmated villain said about Patsy would not look well in print.

Arthur Mannion was never tried for his crime. Pneumonia carried him off within a fortnight after his arrest. His widow still mourns for him, but Nick Carter believes that her eyes will soon brighten, and that there are happy days in store for her.

The three detectives left Washington showered with congratulations.

Jackson Feversham's last words were: "I am going to be in New Mexico next fall. Got a big cattle ranch down there. If you don't come and pay me a visit I shall think you are no friend of mine."

"Then I'll come," said Nick, little thinking, as he spoke the words, what the future held for him in the way of strange adventure.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 439, will contain "In the Shadow of Death; or, Nick Carter's Saving Hand."

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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